

The Transformation of Saul

Acts 9:1-31

Introduction:

There are events that occur which change the course of history. In history class we were told that the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand was the spark that ignited the powder keg called the Balkan States, leading to World War One. One event changed the course of history. Today's study takes us to an event that happened on a road 130 miles from Jerusalem, just outside of Damascus, the capital city of Syria. An angry, violent opponent of Christianity is transformed into the greatest advocate for Christianity. God would use him to write fourteen letters now included in our New Testaments, he planted churches throughout the Middle East and trained up leaders in every community he ministered in. Few people have influenced the life of the church as much as this one man: Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the Apostle. Today we see how the transformation occurred.

Saul's Plan – Acts 9:1-2

1. We just read about revivals in Samaria, and the Gospel heading to Ethiopia via a new convert Philip met. Then 9:1 starts with "But" or "meanwhile" or "and...yet." God was at work breathing life into His church. According to this verse what else was happening?
2. Saul went to the High Priest and asked for something. What was it (vs. 2)? What does this tell us about the practices of the Christians at this early stage of the church's history?
3. What plans did Saul have for the Christians of Damascus? What is his plan for the church (ref. Galatians 1:13)?

Had you stopped Saul and asked for his reasons, he might have said something like this:

"Jesus of Nazareth is dead. Do you expect me to believe that a crucified nobody is the promised Messiah? According to our Law, anybody who is

hung on a tree is cursed [Deut. 21:23]. Would God take a cursed false prophet and make him the Messiah? No! His followers are preaching that Jesus is both alive and doing miracles through them. But their power comes from Satan, not God. This is a dangerous sect, and I intend to eliminate it before it destroys our historic Jewish faith!”¹

God’s Plan – Acts 9:3-9

4. What first got Saul’s attention according to verse 3? What other times has God used light to gain the attention of people for an announcement?
5. How did Saul react to the light? What was the next thing that caught Saul’s attention? (v. 4)
6. What does the voice ask? (vs. 4) Who is speaking?

Though the speaker does not identify himself at first, the use of the name called twice – “Saul, Saul” – reflects OT instances when God addressed people (ie. Genesis 22:11, 46:2; Exodus 3:4; 1 Samuel 3:4,6,10).

7. What is Saul’s question? (vs. 5) Who does Saul think he is addressing?
8. What is the answer to Saul’s question? (v. 5) Why would this be almost more difficult to accept than if the answer was simply “God”?
9. What does Jesus say Saul is doing as he wrecks havoc on the Christians? (v. 5). What does this tell us about Jesus’ view of the church?
10. What instructions are given to Saul? (vs. 6) God could have told him everything right then and there, but did not. Why might God choose this path for Saul?

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 438). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

11. As confirmation of the reality of this event – not just a hallucination – who else hears the voice? (vs. 7) Did they see Jesus? What was their response?
12. When Saul got up off the ground, something had changed. What was it? (vs. 8) What action became necessary after the encounter with Jesus on the road? Ironical that that man bent on leading people out of the city in chains must be led into the city because of blindness.
13. How long was Saul blinded? (vs. 9) What else takes place in that time frame? What might be happening in Saul during that time?

A Test for Ananias – Acts 9:10-18

14. Who was Ananias, and what do we know/learn about him in verse 10?
15. In verses 11-12 God outlines a task for Ananias. What was it? Note the details – the exact location, what Saul is doing, who Saul is looking for, what Ananias is to do. What do we learn about God through this?
16. What concerns does Ananias have (vss. 13-14)? Are they legitimate?
17. God's response does not let Ananias off the hook, but rather reveals a greater plan. What is it? (vs. 15) What else will God reveal to Saul (vs. 16)?
18. According to verse 17 how did Ananias respond to God's call? In what ways did Ananias minister to Saul at that time? (note words and actions)
19. What miracle happened to Saul in verse 18? Compare this with John 3:3.
20. What was the first thing Saul did now he could see? (spiritually and physically) (vs. 18). Verse 19 starts with the second thing he did. What was that?

The experience of Ananias also reminds us that we *should never be afraid to obey God's will*. Ananias at first argued with the Lord and gave some good reasons why he should not visit Saul. But the Lord had everything under control, and Ananias obeyed by faith. When God commands, we must remember that He is working "at both ends of the line," and that His perfect will is always the best.²

And So It Begins... Saul Starts to Minister: Acts 9:19-22

21. Saul stays in Damascus for a while, learning from the believers there and doing more than that. According to verse 20, what else was Saul doing? What convinced Saul of this message?

Saul tarried with the believers in Damascus and no doubt learned from them. Imagine what it would be like to disciple the great Apostle Paul! He discovered that they were loving people, undeserving of the persecution he had inflicted on them; and that they knew the truth of God's Word and only wanted to share it with others.³

22. According to verse 21 what was the response of the crowds who heard Saul preach?
23. What do we learn about Saul (and Gods wisdom) in verse 22?

Opposition Begins – Acts 9:23-25

24. What was the response of the Jews to the wonderful conversion of Saul and his newfound boldness through the Holy Spirit? (vs. 23)
25. What was the plan to deal with Saul (vs. 24)?

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 440). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 440). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

26. How does Saul escape (vs. 25)?

Saul in Jerusalem – Acts 9:26-31

27. Saul, on his escape, decides to return to Jerusalem. What reception does he get there? (vs. 26) Why?

28. Who comes to Saul's rescue? (v. 27) What does he share? What does that tell us about Barnabas? How is Barnabas living up to his name (cf. Acts 4:36)?

29. Describe Saul's ministry in Jerusalem (vss. 28-29).

30. Where does Saul end up according to verse 30? Why might this be the place he is sent?

31. Verse 31 is a summary of how things were at that time. Note the huge change once Saul was out of the picture. What were things like in the church at that point?

Conclusion:

“We found mention made of Saul twice or thrice in the story of Stephen, for the sacred penman longed to come to his story; and now we are come to it, not quite taking leave of Peter but from henceforward being mostly taken up with Paul the apostle of the Gentiles, as Peter was of the circumcision. His name in Hebrew was Saul—desired, though as remarkably little in stature as his namesake king Saul was tall and stately; one of the ancients calls him, *Homo tricubitalis*—but four feet and a half in height; his Roman name which he went by among the citizens of Rome was Paul—little. He was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, a free city of the Romans, and himself a freeman of that city. His father and mother were both native Jews; therefore he calls himself a Hebrew of the Hebrews; he was of the tribe of Benjamin, which adhered to Judah. His education was in the schools of Tarsus first, which was a little Athens for learning; there he acquainted himself

with the philosophy and poetry of the Greeks. Thence he was sent to the university at Jerusalem, to study divinity and the Jewish law. His tutor was Gamaliel, an eminent Pharisee. He had extraordinary natural parts, and improved mightily in learning. He had likewise a handicraft trade (being bred to tent-making), which was common with those among the Jews who were bred scholars (as Dr. Lightfoot saith), for the earning of their maintenance, and the avoiding of idleness. This is the young man on whom the grace of God wrought this mighty change here recorded, about a year after the ascension of Christ, or little more.⁴

When did God start preparing Saul for the ministry that was before him? From his youngest years, long before he had heard of Jesus or knew of the new work of God through His Son. Yet every detail was important – his background, his training, his gifts and abilities. Now it was time for all those pieces to be put at the disposal of the Holy Spirit to see what could be accomplished through Little Paul.

Think about this – all you have been through, all you have learned, through success and failure, all your natural abilities and all you have been trained in is no accident. God has uniquely prepared you for ministry in His kingdom. What is it God wants to do through your life...today?

⁴ Henry, M. (1994). Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume (p. 2100). Peabody: Hendrickson.