

BIB204 NT2 Early Church

Unit 2d

Saul's Conversion, Part 2

Presented by the



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So in this segment, we continue. In the last segment, I did a comparison of chapter 9, chapter 22, and chapter 26. That gives us a fuller picture of what happened to Saul, the significance of the experience, the depth of impact. And so we're going to pick it up again in chapter 9 and verse 8. Jesus has just told him to go into Damascus, and there he will be told what he is to do. We understand Acts 9 now as basically a detailed summarization where, in fact, with chapter 22 and 26, what we have is more of a detailed narrative from the standpoint of Paul's inward experience of the event.

Verse 7, "The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing." So his eyes weren't closed. They weren't sealed shut. They were open. He just couldn't see. "So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus." So he enters Damascus, not as the arch persecutor of the church, but as a broken man. "For three days he was without sight (verse 9), and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.'"

So the Lord gives Ananias instructions, tells him to go to the street called Straight, that he would find Saul in a house there, and that he was to lay his hands on him, and that Saul had seen a vision. The Lord had given Saul a complementary vision, so there was an expectation there. And that vision had to be fulfilled, otherwise the word of the Lord would not be true. And of course, the word of the Lord always has to be true. It's a really nice dynamic that you see here. He was praying, so probably fasting in the three days that he doesn't eat or drink.

By the way, the name Ananias is Anglicized, but it is actually the Hebrew name Hanania. So Hanania answers the Lord and he says, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man (verse 13), he's done much evil to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." So they had heard about Saul even before he came. News traveled fast. So even before Saul got there, they knew that he was coming for them. "The Lord said to him (verse 15), 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' So Ananias departed and entered the house. And after laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"

So he lays his hands on him, Ananias does, and he calls him Brother Saul, which is basically a confirmation of Saul's conversion. Saul is already converted. It is possible to make a case that Saul is converted on the road to Damascus. It is equally possible to make a case that Saul was converted here with the laying on of hands by Ananias. The reason that I would lean towards the former opinion is that Saul trembles and is astonished. He hears that he has been persecuting Jesus of Nazareth, who has somehow spoken to him from heaven. The only conclusion this Pharisee can draw is that Jesus of Nazareth is, in some sense, God. Even if he hasn't worked out the details as of yet, the experience is outside of his normal range of understanding. It completely overturns everything that Saul has believed. The experience is weighty. And so at that point, when he says, "Lord, what should I do?" he's already sold on the Lord Jesus. And I use that term loosely, of course.

So by the time Ananias comes and lays his hands on him, it’s just a matter of indwelling. This is how the Lord wanted to do it. It is a weird transitional period. This man is going to end up being an apostle, but he did not go in and out with the other apostles from the beginning of John’s baptism, John’s baptismal ministry, until the time when Jesus was taken up. And yet Saul will become the apostle Paul. He will say of himself in the Corinthian correspondence, “And lastly, I myself was called an apostle, as one who was born out of due time or as an untimely birth,” basically giving the picture of an aborted fetus. He says he was born out of due time. He wasn’t born at the right time. He senses that keenly. And so all of that comes into play with my opinion that Saul is already a believer in Messiah but he hasn’t been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It’s kind of like what you see with the Samaritans. “Immediately (verse 18) something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.” So there was something over his eyes. This was an external event. And so something covered his eyes, and when Ananias touched him, those scales, that covering fell off, and he was able to see again.

“For some days (verse 19) he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’” And that is an amazing reversal. He came to Damascus to arrest people of the Way, but now he’s going to go into the synagogues, the same synagogues that he would have brought the letters of authority from the high priest of Jerusalem to hand them to the rulers of the synagogues in Damascus to give him authority to go from house to house and to bind Jews and to take them back to Jerusalem. Now he’s going to those same synagogues and he’s got no letter for them. He basically, figuratively at least, tears up those letters and begins to proclaim the message, the faith which he once destroyed, to borrow language from the letter to the Galatians.

So he says, “‘He is the Son of God.’ All who heard him were amazed and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?’ But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.” So they couldn’t destroy his arguments. He destroyed theirs. Well, this made some people of a murderous disposition, acquire a murderous disposition. Verse 23, “Many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.” His disciples. So Saul is already beginning to demonstrate acumen in terms of the gospel. It’s interesting what Luke says here: “his disciples.” Saul’s disciples, which is remarkable because he’s a young believer.

“And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples.” Now, verse 26, it’s important to note that this is about three years later and this is correlated in the letter to the Galatians where Paul says, “After about three years, I went off to Jerusalem. I saw none of the other apostles except Cephas (that would be Peter) and James, the Lord’s brother,” because none of the other disciples or apostles wanted to have anything to do with him because they didn’t trust him. And that was after three years because he had had a ravaging effect on the church, so no one wanted anything to do with him. So verse 26, he came to Jerusalem. “He attempted to join the disciples. They were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.” They probably thought that he was a plant. “Barnabas took him, though, brought him to the apostles (verse 27) and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and

disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.” So even in Jerusalem, he runs into the same kind of trouble that Stephen did; only he gets to escape. And that’s what we read about in verse 30 that “the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea (to the coast) and they sent him off to Tarsus.” They put him on a boat most likely because Caesarea was a port city.

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” Saul would be gone after that point for about 14 years. And we read about that too in the letter to the Galatians. He will be gone. He’ll live in Tarsus for about 12, 13 years, and then Barnabas will show up at his door one day and say, “Hey, we’ve got some believers at Antioch, and I’d like you to come and help me teach them” because Saul has a reputation as a teacher. And that’s what he will do. And after about a year of teaching, those disciples will be called Christians at Antioch. But of course, I’m getting ahead of myself because that’s in Acts 11 and we are still in chapter 9. But in the next unit, in the following unit, we will cover all of that.