



Acts 9:1-9 | Session 22 | Saul Meets Jesus

Acts 9:1-9

Verse 1,2—

And Saul. This is the second time we see Saul in the book of Acts (Acts 8:1-3). Between 8:3 and chapter 9:1, Luke wrote of the results of Saul's persecution of the ekklesia, it was scattered and the word of the Lord was preached throughout Judaea, Samaria, and Africa. Persecution often creates boldness (Acts 4:29) among the persecuted, therefore, rather than shutting the *movement* down, the word of the Lord spread. Luke picks back up in 9:1 with **Saul** who was **yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord**. The Greek word for **slaughter** is often translated as *murder*. The passage does not state the **disciples of the Lord** were *slaughtered*, however, that certainly seems to be the intention of **Saul**.

To accomplish his task of destroying the disciples of the Lord, he **went unto the high priest** requesting permission to go after those who were *scattered* (8:1). This shows us, again, the Jewishness, of these **disciples**. The **high priest** would only have authority over Jews, therefore Saul requested **letters to Damascus to the synagogues**. The **letters** would give him access to the synagogues, and give him legal permission to arrest and extradite the *Jesus* believers. Often teachers explain how Saul went into the churches to find the Christians, but the **disciples** were not in *churches* as we understand churches today. The **disciples** Saul was after were all Jews. Where did they congregate and worship? In the **synagogues**. These new believers still lived under the Law of Moses, still went to the Jewish synagogue.

If he found any of this way, that is, any who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. These faithful Jews taught that belief in Jesus as Messiah, along with obedience to the law of Moses was *the only way* to enter the Kingdom. These Jews followed the doctrine (teaching) of the Apostles.

Saul seems to be the driving force in desiring to arrest these believers, both **men or women** and **bring them bound to Jerusalem**. Jerusalem was the seat of Jewish religious power, where the Sanhedrin ruled. These believers in **the way** would be tried in Jerusalem and perhaps put to death there.

Why did **Saul** harbor so much hatred for these Jewish believers? It could be that he was so steeped in his Jewish tradition that he failed to at least consider whether or not Jesus was the Christ (Messiah). Tradition can often blind us to the truth. We should make it a habit of questioning our assumptions.

Verse 3—

He came near Damascus. This city, often called the oldest city in the world, was about 135 miles north of Jerusalem. It exists today. Many of the Jews who were scattered in Jerusalem made their way there because it was a fairly large and wealthy city, and perhaps many of them had relatives who lived there. There are some who estimate that thirty to forty thousand Jews lived there during this period, and there were multiple synagogues in Damascus (Acts 9:20). The journey would have taken about six days by foot. The narrative doesn't state if **Saul** and his entourage walked; or did they ride horses? It is unlikely horses were used as most Jews did not ride horses. Evidence leans toward walking (as we will see later). It doesn't change the account, either way, but often we see paintings of Saul on the Damascus road and he is riding a horse.

On the way to **Damascus**, **suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven**. Literally, a light *flashed around*. The Greek word is *peristrapto*: *peri* = *around*, *astraptō* = *to lighten*.

Verse 4—



With the flash of light, Saul **fell to the earth** (this is where artists often have Saul falling off his horse!). A question is asked of him from a **voice he heard** “**Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?**” He hears the question, but has no idea who is speaking.

Verse 5—

Who art thou, Lord? He is not using the word **lord** because he knows it is Jesus, he clearly doesn't know, which is why he asks. When we use the word Lord, we are referring to God, or Jesus. Here the word Saul uses is *kurios* which is equivalent to us saying “Sir.” It is a word of respect. The voice identifies himself as **Jesus whom thou persecutest**. To persecute *the way* is to persecute Jesus. Then Jesus makes the statement, **it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks**. This is believed to be an ancient proverb that Saul would have recognized. It is hard to kick against the *goads*. A goad was a sharp stick used to move oxen along. As the oxen were prodded, or *goaded by the sharp stick, they would kick against it*. You may remember Saul's teacher *Gamaliel*, in chapter 5, had warned the Jewish leaders to leave these believing Jews alone because if the movement was *of God, ye cannot overthrow it* (Acts 5:39). One cannot fight the Jesus movement without fighting God. Saul undoubtedly had heard this remark from his teacher, and yet, he kicks against it and fights God. I think what we see here is Jesus informing Saul that he is fighting against God.

Verse 6—

Luke says that upon hearing this from Jesus himself, he **trembles and is astonished**, or literally he was overcome with dread and terror. All through Scripture, when someone received a supernatural revelation, they typically fell on their faces. We shouldn't be so cavalier by saying things like, “God told me...” He realized he had met his match. Now it is at this point where most evangelicals say that **Saul** became a believer by grace through faith. But notice his question, **what wilt thou have me to do?** If this was the moment of salvation by grace through faith and not of works, we should expect the response of Jesus to be, “Do? Why there is nothing you must do, I am giving you a gift.” But that is not Jesus's reply, **Arise, and to into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do**.

Verse 7—

Luke adds a bit of commentary on the men who were with Saul, they **stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man**. The Greek used here for the word voice carries the idea of hearing a sound, but not understanding. Later when *Paul* recounts this Damascus road encounter (22:9), he says, *they heard not the voice*, where the word voice means to “hear with understanding” and they heard “not.” In essence, while it gets a bit lost in English, both 9:7 and 22:9 are saying the same thing. The point being, the message was only given to Saul.

Verse 8—

After he got up, as instructed, he was blind, **he saw no man**, even those his **eyes were opened**. **But they led him by the hand**, which may indicate none of them were on horseback, **and brought him to Damascus**. How far they were from the city we don't know, nor how long it took them to lead Saul there.

Verse 9—

And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. This fasting could be his form of *repentance* which was necessary for the kingdom gospel. We will see next time that he not only fasted, but prayed. We do not want to build a doctrine of fasting from an historical event. While the practice might be profitable at times, Christians in the dispensation of grace are not instructed or commanded to fast. Nonetheless, for a Jew, fasting was a form of repentance. Saul was still under the law. He knew Jewish law and tradition and he continues to practice it here.

