

Acts Chapter 9 (ESV p. 1016) – Saul's Conversion

In chapter 8 we see how the stoning of Stephen, which was meant to stop Christ's disciples from preaching, actually spurred them on to preach and teach more than ever and it even sent them to foreign lands. In chapter 9, our focus comes back to the young man who watched and condoned the execution, who was so proud of what had been done that he vowed to continue it on an even larger scale. Here (verse 1-4) he goes so far as to visit the high priest to request permission to go to all the synagogues (churches) to find those who are following the Way (Jesus) and to drag them back to Jerusalem to imprison them (both men and women).

But God has a different plan. Jesus himself confronts Saul. He comes as a flash of light, almost like a bolt of lightning (verse 3). This knocks Saul to the ground in a forced position of subjection (verse 4).

Then, Jesus speaks with authority, calling Saul's name twice to get his attention, then questioning Saul about what he has been doing (verse 5). Saul, obviously already a little afraid, begins to recognize that this is not an ordinary man, but someone he should revere. He responds to him, "Who are you, Lord?" Jesus does not hesitate to reveal himself to Saul. He says, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Then, Jesus really emphasizes his power over Saul's stubbornness. In the KJV we find the phrase, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," meaning "this time you won't be able to resist the truth." (*Though some other bible translations leave this phrase out in this chapter, it is found later in Acts 26:14 (ESV p. 1036) when Paul testifies to Agrippa*). This phrase was a common saying that in that time that literally referred to pricks or sharp pointed sticks (sometimes called goads) which were used to keep an animal moving. Occasionally, the animal might kick back in response to being prodded with the stick. In kicking back, he would stick himself again. Figuratively, the phrase meant that it was useless to rebel against authority because it would ultimately cause you pain. In essence, using this common saying of the times, Jesus is telling Saul that he won't be able to resist against what He has planned for him. As Saul responds to Jesus with trembling and astonishment, ready to do as he is told (verse 6), his men who also hear the voice of Jesus, but do not see from where it comes are also afraid and speechless (verse 7).

Suddenly Saul cannot see anything (verse 8). Without warning, the one who leads others has no choice but to be led. Perhaps this is exactly what Jesus intended. He wanted to humble Saul. According to the Scriptures humility is a prerequisite to salvation. (See Micah 6:8 (ESV p. 868), Psalm 25:9 (ESV P. 507), Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV p. 1084). Even Christ,

God's son when he came in the form of a man, had to humble himself before Almighty God. So, Saul becomes completely dependent on his men, but the only thing that they can do to help him is to lead him to where the voice said that he should go and wait. He is so distressed that he does not eat or drink for three days, but he prays (verse 11).

While they are waiting, God is working out His own plan (verse 9-16). He speaks to the disciple Ananias to give him an assignment to lay hands on Saul to restore his sight. Ananias naturally questions the Lord who appears to be sending him into harm's way. Then, the Lord reveals his plan for Saul to Ananias, who immediately obeys. And Saul recovers not only his physical sight, but his spiritual sight as well, being filled with the Holy Spirit (verse 17-19). He eats and spends time with the other disciples in Damascus, receiving strength for what he is about to do and for what he will endure. (Ephesians 2:10 [ESV p. 1079](#)), Hebrews 13:20-21([ESV p. 1112](#)).

Now Saul begins to preach openly in the churches of Damascus. His faith and boldness grow, however so do the suspicions of some of the Jews. They have not forgotten his threats and open hatred of the people of the Way. Confused by his 360-degree turn around, they plot to kill him (verse 20-24). His followers rescue him by night and send him to Jerusalem, but the disciples there are also still afraid of him until Barnabas brings him before the apostles and tells them the story of how Jesus confronted him on the way to Damascus (verse 25-28). Then, they believe in his conversion and accept him openly. Now, just as they are still debating against the Greek Jews, he is too. When the Greek Jews decide that they want him dead, his fellow-believers decide that he should leave them for awhile and return to his home in Tarsus. So, he goes home at their request, which allows for a time of peace and rest for the churches at Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria. And the church of Christ increases again (verse 29-31).

Saul's conversion from a murdering hater of Jews who believed in Jesus, to a loyal, dedicated proponent of the Son of God is proof of the sovereign will of God. What God plans will happen no matter how impossible it seems (Isaiah 14:24)- ([ESV p. 644](#))