

Saving Saul

Acts 9:1-9

Background

Before he came to be known as Paul he was Saul; the latter was his name among the Jews pre-Christ. He came to be known as Paul in his ministry among the Gentiles (Acts 13:9). Paul is a Roman name. This name became primary in a ministry focused on connecting with the Gentile (non-Jewish) audiences he was preaching to throughout the Roman Empire. *Why did he have two names?* As a Roman citizen, Paul would have had both a Hebrew and a Roman name. This was common for Jews in the Roman Empire.

Jews, especially those with Roman citizenship like Paul, often carried dual names. The Hebrew name would be used in the context of their Jewish religious identity, while the Roman or Greek name would be used in civic and commercial interactions. (Dunn, 1998, p. 76).

The shift to "Paul" aligns with his broader mission to the Gentiles, as he sought to adapt to their cultural context (Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:7-8; Ephesians 3:8). He is all things to all men that he might by all means save some (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

Paul's self-description evolves over time throughout his epistles, reflecting his growing humility and understanding of his role as an apostle of Christ. Here below is a brief description of how his description of himself changes throughout his ministry.

Early Ministry — Least of the Apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9)

Letters: Galatians - AD 48-49; 1 Thessalonians - AD 50-51; 2 Thessalonians AD 50-51; 1 Corinthians AD 53-54; 2 Corinthians AD 55-56; Romans AD 57-58

- In his early ministry letters, Paul emphasizes his **authority as an apostle**, appointed directly by Christ.
- **1 Corinthians 15:9-10 (NKJV)** – ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me.
- Here, Paul acknowledges his past persecution of Christians but asserts his position as an apostle. He still holds the title but expresses humility and the key role of grace in his appointment and abundant labor.

Mid-Ministry — Less Than the Least of All the Saints (Ephesians 3:8)

Letters: Ephesians - AD 60-62; Colossians AD 60-62; Philippians - AD 60-62; Philemon - AD 60-62

- As Paul's ministry progresses, his tone becomes more humble, focusing on his role as a servant of Christ rather than emphasizing his apostolic authority.
- **Ephesians 3:8 (NKJV)** – "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."
- Paul now describes himself as "less than the least of all the saints," emphasizing his deep humility and recognition that his mission to preach to the Gentiles is an undeserved grace.

Late Ministry — Chief of Sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)

Letters: 1 Timothy - AD 62-64; Titus - AD 62-64; 2 Timothy AD 66-67

- In his later letters, Paul's self-assessment reaches its most humble stage. He identifies himself not just as the least of apostles or saints but as the **chief of sinners**.
- **1 Timothy 1:15 (NKJV)** — "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."
- By this point, Paul no longer focuses on his apostleship or even his role among the saints. Instead, he emphasizes his personal sense of unworthiness, referring to himself as the greatest of sinners. This demonstrates Paul's deep awareness of God's grace.

Summary of Paul's Progression

1. **Early Ministry Letters:** Emphasizes his role as an apostle, though acknowledging his unworthiness due to his past.
2. **Middle Ministry Letters:** Describes himself as a servant and "less than the least of all the saints," focusing on grace.
3. **Late Ministry Letters:** Calls himself the "chief of sinners," highlighting a profound sense of humility.

This progression shows Paul's increasing humility as his relationship with Christ deepens and his appreciation of grace grows..

Introduction

The persecuted church has been scattered into the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). Hellenistic Jews (as well as Aramaic speaking Jews) were being treated with extreme prejudice and brutality by their own people because of their faith in Jesus. The situation looked terrible. And, to be sure, it was a terrible ordeal. People who have waited for Messiah are being harassed and afflicted because of their decision to follow Him. But everything was actually going according to plan.

Persecution aimed at stopping the church has actually been key to its promotion and the spread of the gospel. Dispersed Jesus followers are going everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). For example, Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them (Acts 8:5). The Jerusalem church deacon's ministry was validated by healings, exorcisms, and other miracles in a Samaritan city. Thus, with Philip's preaching and powerful signs that he was telling the truth, the Samaritans became Jesus followers. And so, the mistreatment was producing good... according to plan; the hate directed toward Jesus followers had led them into Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8). And this resulted in more people hearing the good news about life through faith in Jesus.

This all started with the murder of Stephen (Acts 6:5; 7:54-60). Remember him? His willing sacrifice was the beginning of an outbreak of persecution. And leading the persecution was a young man that had consented to Stephen's death (Acts 8:1; 7:58) — *Saul of Tarsus* (Acts 9:11; 21:39). Luke has, prior to chapter nine, focused on the

evangelism work of Philip. He now goes back to tell us what has been happening in the meanwhile with Saul.

Saul is a Pharisee and very zealous for the traditions of his people. His support for Stephen's death just the beginning. Since then he has been relentless in trying to stop the spread of the Way (Acts 8:2-3; 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). Saul has carefully visited every synagogue to punish Jesus followers and compel them to blaspheme (Acts 26:11). He has hauled away both men and women to trials and executions (Acts 26:10). *Why?* To destroy the church (Galatians 1:13). Saul did all of these things in an unsparing effort to put an end to the Jesus movement (Acts 26:9-11). While Philip was preaching Christ to the Samaritans and being used to bring an Ethiopian eunuch to faith (Acts 8:26-40), Saul has led the evil work of trying to (1) stop the spread of the gospel and (2) force people to renounce their faith in Jesus. He is serious. How serious? The young man has obtained extradition papers. That is, Saul has acquired permission from the high priest to arrest and return to Jerusalem any Jew he found caught up in the Jesus movement. In the opening of chapter nine, he is traveling with an entourage to Damascus to arrest any Jews that he finds claiming to follow Jesus. Again, it is a no-holds-barred effort to destroy the church (Galatians 1:13).

His concern about the strength of the movement in Damascus is not unwarranted. Indeed, Saul was on point in thinking that the Jesus movement in that city was not to be ignored; the Lord's followers will keep spreading His message (Acts 8:4-5). Luke introduces us to one of those followers in the account of Saul's conversion: Ananias (*Yahweh is gracious*, Acts 22:12). This man is a disciple (μαθητής) or a learner of Jesus' (Acts 9:10). As we consider the conversion of Saul and the role of Ananias we are given indispensable insights for missional living in our own day.

Christ Confronts His Persecutor (Acts 9:1-9; 26:11)

¹ Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." ⁶ So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." ⁷ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they

led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

9:1 The **still** (ἔτι) of Acts 9:1 indicates that Luke is picking up again his story about Saul. Who is Saul? (See the introduction to this chapter.) He is the young man introduced during the execution of the first martyr of the church (Acts 7:58). Saul, beyond lending his consent and support to the murder of Stephen, was leading the vicious attack on the Jesus-Follower community.

¹ Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. ³ As for Saul, he made havoc on the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison. (Acts 8:1-3)

While the Lord was using Philip to reach the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-8) and an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), Saul was spearheading efforts to destroy the church (Galatians 1:13). Saul is a Pharisee (Acts 23:6); it should not be overlooked that he went to a Sadducee for extradition papers. The writ of the high priest would give him permission to return to Jerusalem with followers of the *Way* who had fled the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin. (The right of the religious rulers to handle such matters according to their own law as granted them by Rome. See 1 Maccabees 15:20-24.) The persecution of the church was a political and religious collaboration against Jews that believed in Jesus of Nazareth.

But, again, who is he? By birth he is a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5). By conviction he is a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; Philippians 3:5). By citizenship he is a Roman (Acts 22:25-29) born in Tarsus ([Acts 9:11; 21:39](#)) and educated by one of the greatest rabbis of the ancient world - Gamaliel (Acts [22:3](#)). By education he is Greek. By grace, though, he will become a Jesus follower himself.

Concerning our Bible here are some interesting statistics about Saul's work after his encounter with Jesus:

Word Count Contribution of New Testament Authors

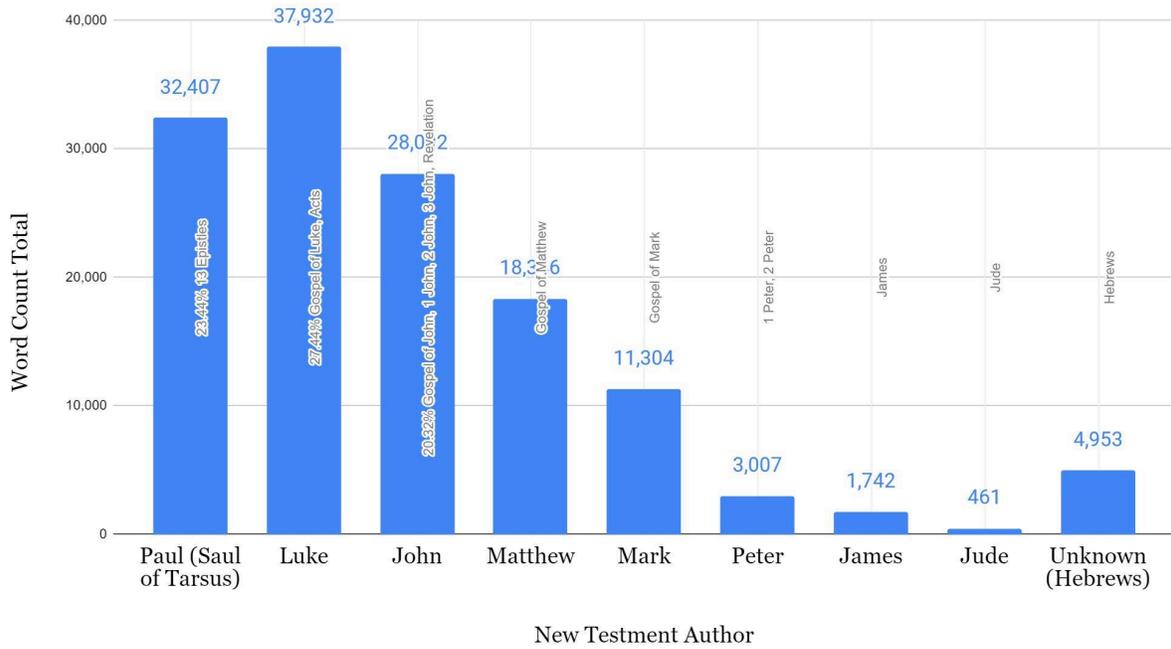


Figure 1: New Testament Word Count Contribution by Author

New Testament Book Count Contribution by Author

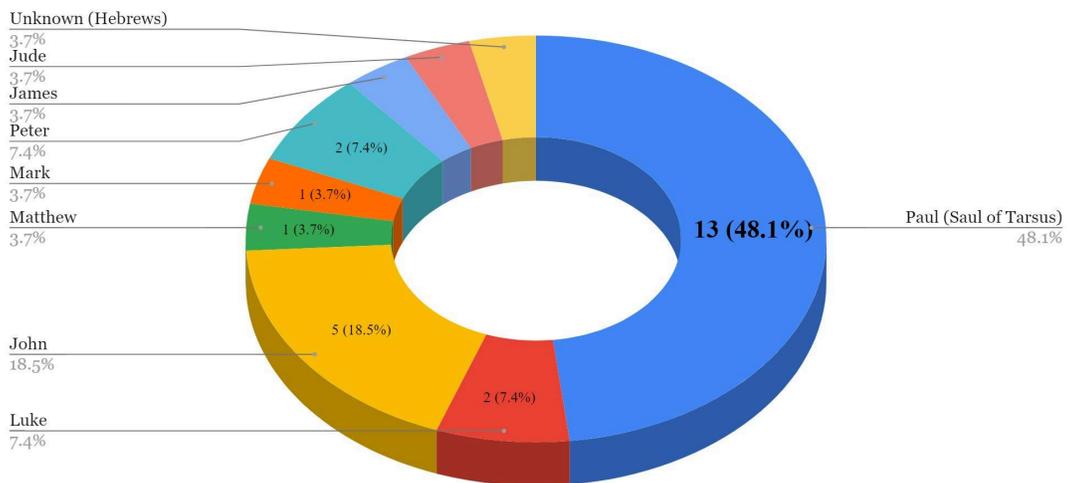


Figure 2: New Testament Book Count Contribution by Author

We are sometimes ready to write a person off based on their faults and failures. However, while we may not be able to see how they could amount to much, with God all things are possible.

9:2 But prior to the days when he would be inspired to write the great chapter on love (1 Corinthians 13) or his treatise on the gospel (Romans) he would be a young man with a bitter hatred for Jesus followers. He is now on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus with extradition authority; he has permission from the high priest to (1) arrest anyone he finds calling on the name of Jesus and (2) to bring them bound back to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2).

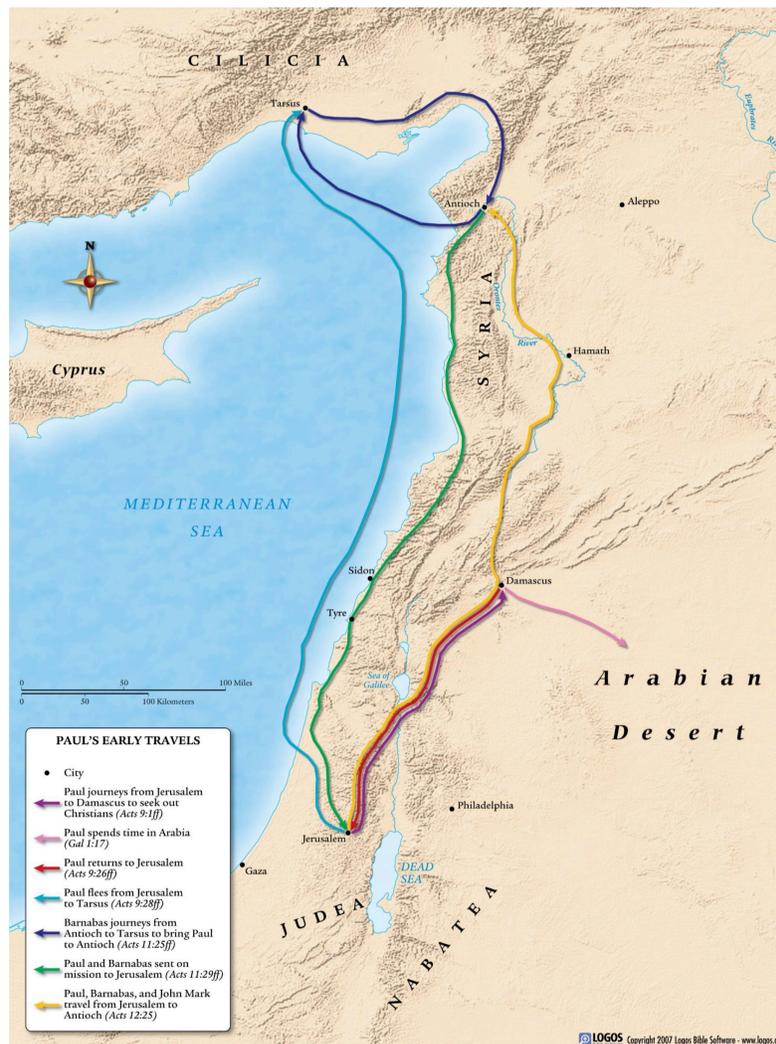


Figure 3: The road that Saul (Paul) took from Jerusalem to Damascus was over 100 miles.

9:3-4 Saul and his cohort are **near Damascus** when they are interrupted. They were accosted by a light from the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). The brightness of the light that **shone around him** exceeded the light of the midday sun itself (Acts

26:12-13) and rendered the church persecutor unable to see (Acts 22:11). Saul **fell to the ground**. Did he fall as one who has lost his balance due to fright? No. He has prostrated himself. (The same verb is used in Matthew 2:11 and Mark 7:25 to indicate that a person has lowered themselves in reverence.) I believe, considering the way the word is used elsewhere in the New Testament (Matthew 2:11; Mark 7:25), that Saul quickly fell in both fear and awe before whatever or whomever was shining the light.

17.22 πίπτω^c; προσπίπτω^a: to prostrate oneself before someone, implying supplication—‘to prostrate oneself before, to fall down before.’⁷⁷ πίπτω^c: καὶ πεσόντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτῷ ‘and prostrating themselves, they worshiped him’ [Mt 2:11](#).

προσπίπτω^a: προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ‘she prostrated herself at his feet’ [Mk 7:25](#).

A strictly literal translation of προσπίπτω^a or πίπτω^c, namely, ‘to fall down before,’ can be entirely misleading in that it may suggest an accident caused by stumbling or tripping. It may therefore be necessary in a number of languages to translate ‘to bow down low before’ or ‘to bow down to the ground before.’¹

⁷⁷ πίπτω^c and προσπίπτω^a ([17.22](#)) differ to some extent from προσκυνέω^b ([17.21](#)) in that they focus primarily upon the actual position rather than upon the intent of showing reverence or making supplication. προσκυνέω^b is the more formal term and focuses more upon the attitude of reverence or honor.

¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 217). New York: United Bible Societies.

It was as he was falling down or making himself prone, he heard a voice in his native tongue of Hebrew posing a question: **Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**

The Missional Meaning of Saul, Saul

There is significance in the twofold mention of Saul’s name in the address. In the Old Testament the doubling of a name is used when God is calling for the attention of someone that he intends you use greatly. Consider the following:

- Become The Foundation for the Nation (Genesis 22:11) - God calls out “Abraham, Abraham!” He would later use this man to bring about the beginning of the Jewish nation, the and the line of the Redeemer.
- Bring Deliverance from Bondage (Exodus 3:4) - God calls out “Moses, Moses!” from the burning bush. He is being enlisted to serve God in the work of delivering Israel from bondage.
- Restore the Priesthood and Transition from Judges to Kings (1 Samuel 3:10) - God calls out to the young boy, “Samuel, Samuel!” He is being called to serve God in restoring integrity to the priesthood.

Saul is being called into ministry.

The Emotional Meaning of Saul, Saul

This form of address is called the double vocative and it often indicates deep emotion in the speaker. Consider (1) the following cases where it is used by Jesus and then (2) verses that explain how Jesus feels about those being address.

- Addressing Martha (Luke 10:41) - And Jesus answered and said to her, “**Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.**” And then what is recorded about his disposition toward Martha? The answer comes from the gospel of John: Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (John 11:5)
- Addressing Jerusalem (Luke 13:34) - “**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!**” Later Luke will share this insight into how Jesus feels concerning Jerusalem and her fate: Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, (Luke 19:41).

What are we to say, then, about the question of Jesus to Saul (Acts 9:4)? In the light of these other passages where the double vocative is used and where Jesus’ feelings toward the person or group are disclosed, *Jesus loves Saul*. It is also, from the perspective of a Jewish reader familiar with the Old Testament, a call of enlistment to service. Let this sink in. The Lord loves the one that has been persecuting Him and is calling him into service.

44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you
(Matthew 5:44)

(9:5) In the next verse we have the first calling out and confronting of Saul’s crime of unbelief. Where, you ask, is the mention of unbelief? Let us note that we are reading Luke’s account. In the words of Saul (later Paul) himself through Luke this is what was said:

⁶ “Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. ⁷ And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ ⁸ So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ (Acts 22:6-8)

They are nearly identical. Luke, however, does not mention the **of Nazareth** that Jesus gives as an answer to Saul’s question. (It is not a contradiction because Luke does not deny that it was said.) Is it significant? Consider the following:

- The Testimony of Peter (Acts 2:22) - When speaking to a crowd of people that are questioning the miraculous events of Pentecost Peter says Jesus of Nazareth. In the light of most recent events (John 19:19) there is no doubt who Peter is referring to.
- The Testimony of the Stephen's Accusers (Acts 6:14) - The name Jesus is mentioned with the region (Nazareth) that the rabble rousing rabbi was from. In this way the crowd knows which Jesus was being referenced by Stephen and his accusers.

Through this mention of Nazareth the Lord disambiguates the name *Jesus*. Saul was persecuting people that call on this name in reference to the person that hailed from the town of Nazareth. *Jesus of Nazareth* was associated with claims of blood relations to David, miracles, signs, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the power to heal the lame. Jesus of Nazareth is the figure at the center of the cult that Saul is trying to stop. And why is Saul trying to stop the Jesus movement? Because he does not believe it.

Despite all of the signs, wonders, and witnesses, **goads** against which it is hard to kick, Saul rails against the church. Each of these things is being used by the Holy Spirit to convict Saul of the sin of unbelief. Each is a sharp object pricking his conscience and causing him discomfort. And yet he has been determined to be unbelieving. Although unobligated, Jesus stages an intervention to throw light on the real issue and to help his sworn enemy.

9:6 The light, the voice, and the revelation overwhelm Saul. He is **trembling and astonished**. This means he has been raising his hand against Messiah and His people (Psalm 2:1-3). Indeed, he has helped to put to death people who have been right all along about Jesus of Nazareth. He was so blind. But now, although blind (Acts 9:8), Saul sees.

Ananias' Assignment (Acts 9:10-12)

¹⁰ Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. ¹² And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

The work of God in the life of Saul has been humbling. Three days ago he was on his way to Damascus with extradition papers to arrest the Lord's disciples. But things have changed and God has brought the Pharisee to the point where he desperately wants the

help of one of the Lord's disciples - **Ananias**. Three days ago Saul would have seized this man and taken him to Jerusalem for trial. But now, blinded by glory, he can only hope for the helping hand of the Lord's disciple.

When Ananias sees the Lord in a vision he is given an assignment that involves Saul of Tarsus. Notice that when Ananias is called there is no confusion about who is speaking. He says, "**Here I am, Lord.**" This stands in stark contrast with Saul who was completely ignorant regarding the view and voice of Jesus. Jesus' sheep know his voice (John 10:27).

What follows is a dialogue between two people. From one perspective it is the sending of a subject by his Sovereign Lord. Looked at from another angle it is a request upon the redeemed by his Redeemer. Either of these views is valid and certainly offers something to the reader as he attempts to make sense of the text. But it is perhaps most helpful, when considering the repeated use of the word disciple (μαθητής) and trying to understand the meaning of the passage for its original readers, to see it as an assignment and lesson for a student from his Teacher-Lord. In the talking of the text, when looked at this way, the Pedagogue is seen patiently imparting truths that will serve Ananias and readers of this account as he carries out the instructions.

9:10-11 In a vision Ananias is called by name and quickly responds, "**Here I am, Lord.**" (Ananias' response is a reminder of Isaiah's response to the Lord's question about who will be a witness for Him; See Isaiah 6:8.) As with Joseph (Matthew 2:13; 2:20), a paralyzed man (Matthew 9:5), Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:26), and recently with Saul (Acts 9:6) the command to **Arise and go** is given with the expectation of *immediate obedience*. The instructions are clear - put a healing hand on a man that has sought to destroy the church (Acts 9:12). And in the instructions to Ananias the Lord has given two indications that Saul will not be problem. First, Jesus tells Ananias that Saul having already been given a vision. Remember that before the Lord called Philip he had gone before preparing the Ethiopian Eunuch. And in this instance, before calling Ananias, the Lord has gone before preparing Saul.

The Spirit of the Lord goes before those sent making hearts ready for what will be said. He goes before the preaching preparing people for the truth that will be declared.

Second, there is what Saul saw and heard on the road to Damascus. He saw the Lord and was confronted personally by Christ Himself in Aramaic about his sin. Notice, that Jesus does not tell Ananias at the time about Saul's experience on the road. (He will tell him more later; See Acts 22:12-16.) And neither will He tell us everything that He is doing to prepare people to hear the gospel from us. At some point we have to be willing to trust and obey (Matthew 28:18).

Questions for Community Discussion

- What indicator is there that Ananias knows Jesus? (John 10:27)
- Why does Jesus tell Ananias that Saul of Tarsus is praying? (Acts 9:11)
- Are you responding in immediate obedience to the Lord's command to go? (Matthew 28:18-20)
- In what ways did God prepare you for the gospel before you heard it?

Ananias' Answer (Acts 9:13-14)

¹³ Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

Based on the absence of **Arise** in Acts 9:15 we may gather that the concerns of Ananias were given *while getting up*. What remained after the concerns expressed in these two verses was communicated while going; I imagine that he was now standing when the command to **Go** was given. Seen this way his concerns are not two reasons for refusing to go but the real concerns of a man in relationship with Jesus. He was not afraid to share what bothered him about the assignment with his Teacher and Lord. And the Teacher is not seen getting angry over the questions; it is a teaching moment.

Saul's reputation precedes him. Ananias had **heard from many about this man**. With each concern that is shared we have Ananias' implied concern for himself.

1st Concern - Expressed: Saul has a history of hurting Jesus followers. *Implied:* Since I am a Jesus follower I might get hurt.

The damage done by Saul is well known. On account of his persecution in Jerusalem people had already come from Jerusalem to Damascus seeking refuge.

2nd Concern - Expressed: Saul has arrived with the authority to arrest Jesus followers in Damascus. *Implied:* Since I am a Jesus follower in Damascus he has authority to arrest me... and you are sending me to the man.

Ananias uses the phrase **who call on Your name** to refer to Jesus followers. Peter had used this wording, originally used in Joel 2:32, earlier in Luke's history of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:21).

Ananias' Assurance (Acts 9:15-16)

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Jesus takes time to answer the concerns of Ananias. In each answer He gives assurance. The command to **Go** is followed by the first assurance: Saul has been selected to bring the name of Jesus to Gentiles, rulers, and Jews. In the language of reason there is an already-not-yet explanation of why there is nothing to fear.

The Lord changes whom He chooses.

To bear the name is to be a willing witness for Jesus. Without expanding further He has told Ananias that the grace of God is greater than Saul's sin or sin nature. Jesus says, in effect, "Yes, Ananias, he has a history of hurting My people. But, because of My own immutable decision to show kindness to my enemy, he has a future of faithfulness to Me and My people." I found the second reason curious. It did not immediately makes sense to me that this would have been an assurance to Ananias or even a reason for going. But then I saw that the sufferings mentioned were heard as the common experience of the family of faith. Ananias is being told that Saul will suffer the pain that he caused not as retribution but as a consequence of belonging to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:22-28).

The promised suffering for the Lord's sake is a word sign of Saul's eminent and inevitable salvation.

Ananias' Action (Acts 9:17-18)

¹⁷ And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

Ananias accepts the assurances and takes the assignment. After locating the house he goes in and meets the man who has been breathing murder and threats against the disciples. But by the grace of God faith has overcome fear; He puts his hands on the blind and broken man and calls him **Brother Saul**. This is significant because Saul has not yet received the Holy Spirit. This is noteworthy in light of the fact that the blind man has not yet said anything to indicate that the hate is gone. Ananias believes what the Lord has said and sees by faith the new man even before the changes are complete.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1)

Ananias is sent with the mission of helping Saul to see and be filled with the Holy Spirit. If Spirit filling is not forced but is the outworking of unconditional yieldedness we see the positive side of the pain that the Lord causes. It was the confrontation, the

blindness, and the waiting that worked in the man to produce both godly sorrow and surrender.

Sometimes we do our best work with God when we allow Him to humble the rebel. And we do our worst when we attempt to deliver the criminal from a crises that will be used to bring about his conversion. Discernment is needed by those who would cooperate with the Lord in His working to save our fellow man.

Questions for Community Discussion

1. In what ways does God use discomfort to bring about a good change in Saul? (Acts 9:8-12)
2. What is the reason for using Ananias to help bring about instructions, healing, baptizing, and filling? (Acts 9:17-18) Hint: Paul is being helped by someone that he was there to hurt.

The Apologetic of a Changed Life (Acts 9:19-22)

¹⁹ So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. ²¹ Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?” ²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

Years ago a mentor shared with me that the greatest modern miracle is the miracle of a changed life. Over the years I have seen the truth of this. When a person known for acts of excessive evil becomes synonymous with deeds of definite good, a miracle has taken place. The gospel of Jesus Christ is made more credible through the stark contrast between what the person was and what they become. When the change is not forced and the person has no material or social gain from the change, their conversion becomes an apologetic. Such is the case with Saul.

9:19 After receiving his sight and the filling of the Holy Spirit, brother Saul spends time in fellowship with the disciples at Damascus. He had been there to arrest them. Now he is with them for another reason - mutual encouragement in their common faith.

9:20-22 When given an opportunity he does what Christ asks of us all; he witnesses. More than just telling the truth, **he preached the Christ in the synagogues**. As he called other Jews to faith in Jesus of Nazareth people were amazed and confused. Formerly this same man had been trying to destroy people who call on the name Jesus. Now he is calling his brethren to call on the name Jesus. In other words he says, “Brethren, I was wrong. Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Messiah. He is the Son of God promised in the Scriptures (Acts 9:20). I know that I tried to get people to change their minds but... my mind and heart have been changed. I was blind but now I see. Join me in receiving forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus.” Of course it was hard to receive and some tried to say that he was wrong. But, in the power of the Holy Spirit, he was **proving that Jesus is the Christ**. Saul himself is now one of the many reasons why people have to consider the claim that Jesus is the Christ. After all, the leading prosecuting attorney in the case against faith in Jesus has dropped his case and become a proponent for the Lord.

References

Dunn, J. D. G. (1998). *The theology of Paul the Apostle*. Eerdmans.