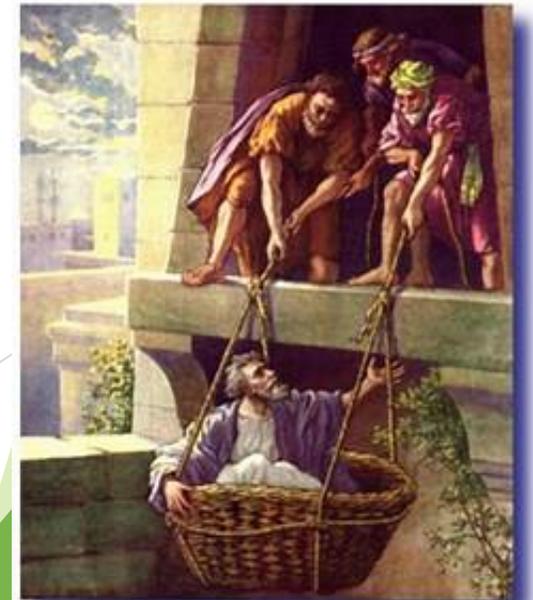


Acts of the Apostles

9:1-31

The Conversion of Saul/Paul



Last Week in Acts..



- ▶ We read about the beginning of evangelization to Gentiles.
- ▶ Philip went to Samaria to escape persecution in Jerusalem. While there he preached the word of Jesus Christ and healed the Samaritans. **The Samaritans responded with joy, and many were baptized.** Even Simon the Sorcerer was baptized, believed in Jesus Christ and was loyal to Philip. However when Peter and John travel to Samaria to lay hands on the people and impart the Holy Spirit. Simon wants to buy this gift. He is rebuked by Peter!
- ▶ Philip is later told by an angel to travel to Gaza. On his way he meets a wealthy Ethiopian Eunuch who is reading Isaiah. Philip interprets the meaning of Isaiah's Suffering Servant in light of Jesus, the Messiah's life, death and Resurrection.
- ▶ The Eunuch believes and asks for baptism. Philip baptizes him and is miraculously taken away by the Spirit and continues to preach on his way to Caesarea.
- ▶ The Eunuch responds to the Good News with rejoicing.

Acts 9:1-2

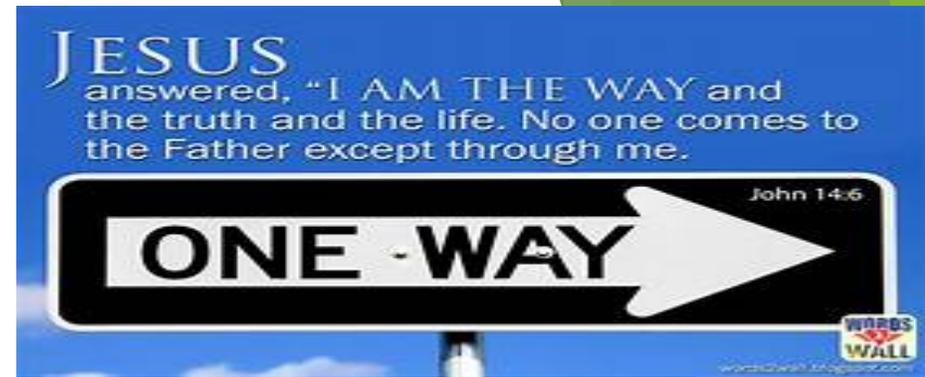


- ▶ Now Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord, went to **the high priest**² and asked him for letters to the **synagogues in Damascus**, that, if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains.

Diaspora Jews had fled to Damascus and settled there as well. It appears that the Romans had given the high priest authority to pursue fugitives.

The high priest is not named. Note that it is Saul who initiates the actions here, not the high priest.

The Way



- ▶ The “Way” is used as a name for the early Christian community in several places in Acts of the Apostles.
- ▶ The monastic Jewish sect, the Essenes, also used “The Way” to describe their lifestyle. This included a strict adherence to the Law or Torah and a separation from the corrupt society and Temple.
- ▶ *The Navarre Bible* states “the corresponding Hebrew word means **religious behavior**. Here it refers to both Christian lifestyle and the Gospel itself; indirectly it means all the early followers of Jesus and all those who come after them and are **on the way to heaven**; it reminds us of Jesus’ words, “The gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few” Mat 7:14)

The Call of Saul

Acts 9:3-5

- ▶ On his journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” ⁵ He said, “Who are you, sir?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.



Saul, Saul Why Do You Persecute me?

The light of Christ shines in darkness. It will allow Saul to “see” the Truth about Jesus the Christ.

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

- ▶ Jesus does not say “Why are you persecuting my members, but why do you persecute me?”
- ▶ Think of Matthew 25; “I was hungry and you gave me food..” and “As you did it to one of the least of my brothers, you did it to me.”



Acts 9:6-9

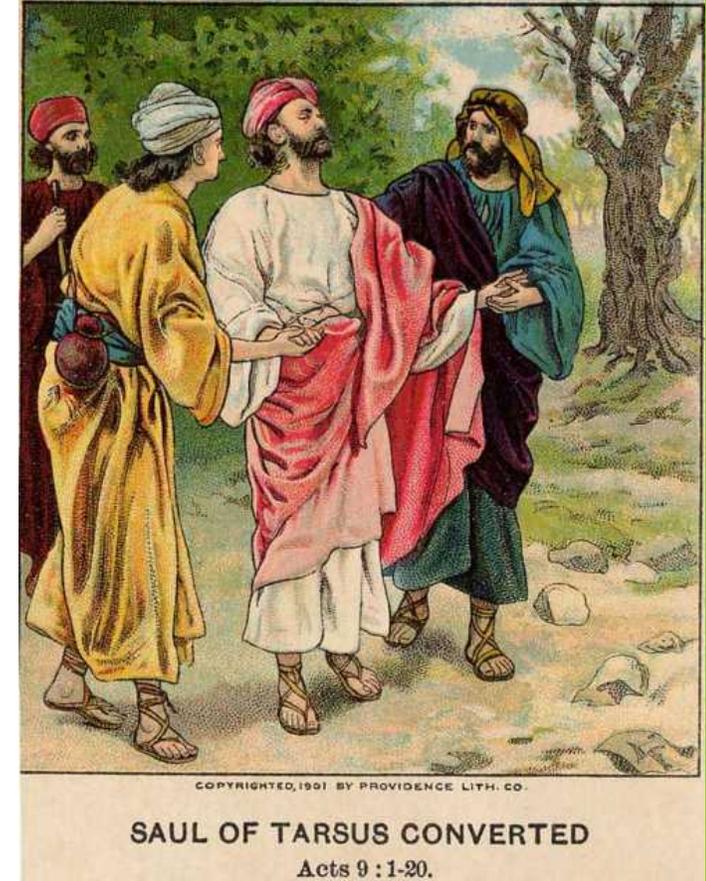
- ▶ ⁶ Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.” ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, for **they heard the voice but could see no one.** ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but **when he opened his eyes he could see nothing;** so they led him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. ⁹ For three days **he was unable to see, and he neither ate nor drank.**

NABRE footnote calls this “religious blindness.” It is symbolic of the “blindness” that Saul had as a prosecutor.

The blindness is from God. The **fasting** is from Saul’s heart. It is preparation for Baptism and repentance. It is also common practice before facing new challenges in life or vocation.

The experience of being blind

- ▶ Saul depended on help from his companions to guide him to Damascus. He is not in charge now!
- ▶ This is humbling.
- ▶ Saul does not know what God has in store for him.
- ▶ He is frightened, not knowing if he will ever see again. **And he was just told that he had been persecuting the Son of God!**
- ▶ God's plan is to take Saul's zealous nature and energy and use it to take the Word to the Gentiles.



Acts 9:10-14

- ▶ ¹⁰ There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹ The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight and ask at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul. **He is there praying,** ¹² and [in a vision] he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay [his] hands on him, that he may regain his sight.”

What do we learn about Saul here?



- ▶ He is praying and fasting after his encounter with Jesus.
- ▶ He has had a vision of the risen Christ and a **second vision** as well about Ananias.
- ▶ This is the only *post-Pentecostal* appearance of *Jesus* to anyone in the New Testament!
- ▶ He is from Tarsus.

Acts 9:13-16

- ▶ ¹³ But Ananias replied, “Lord, I have heard from many sources about this man, what evil things he has done to your *holy ones* in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to imprison all who call upon your name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, ¹⁶ and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name.”

Sometimes translated as “saints”, a term often used of Early Christians in Jerusalem and Judea.

The persecutor of the Name of Jesus is to be the one to proclaim the name. He will be known as a “Christian” bearing the name of the one he prosecuted. (irony)

The Destiny of Saul foretold-

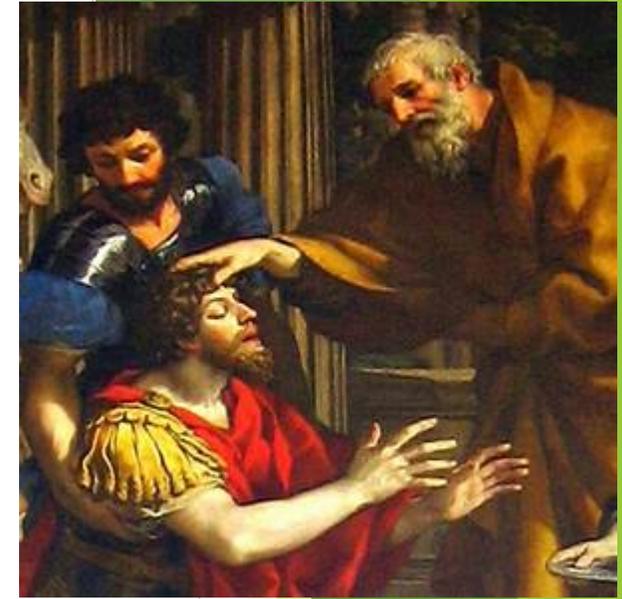
- ▶ “Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, ¹⁶ and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name.”
- ▶ Saul is not *only* to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, he will ultimately evangelize to kings and the “children of Israel”. He did indeed preach to Jews in synagogues of Cyprus, Antioch and Iconium and to King Agrippa (Acts 25) as well as to Gentiles.
- ▶ But it will not be easy and Saul/Paul will suffer in the name of Jesus Christ.

New Testament Churches



Acts 9:17-19

- ▶ ¹⁷ So Ananias went and entered the house; **laying his hands on him**, he said, “Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared to you on the way by which you came, that you may regain your sight and **be filled with the holy Spirit.**” ¹⁸ Immediately things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and when he had eaten, he recovered his strength.



So Ananias is to both impart the Holy Spirit *and* cure Saul's blindness.

Blindness cured, strength restored and the Baptism of Saul



- ▶ ¹⁸ Immediately things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and when he had eaten, he recovered his strength.
- ▶ Recall that Saul had fasted for three days. He was then baptized. Food restored his strength.
- ▶ Scales or “film” over the eyes is a primitive way of describing blindness.
- ▶ In OT book Tobit, white scales covered his eyes leaving him blind for 4 years! This after sleeping outside and having sparrow “droppings” infect his eyes. (Tobit 2:9-10)¹⁵

Acts 9:19-22

- ▶ He stayed **some days** with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰ and he began at once to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, that he is **the Son of God**. ²¹ All who heard him were astounded and said, “**Is not this the man who in Jerusalem ravaged those who call upon this name**, and came here expressly to take them back in chains to the chief priests?” ²² But Saul grew all the stronger and confounded [the] Jews who lived in Damascus, proving that **this is the Messiah**.

Some days is actually 3 years!

This is the first time in Acts that the title *Son of God* is used.

Again the man who once persecuted those who called upon the name of Jesus now proclaims it.

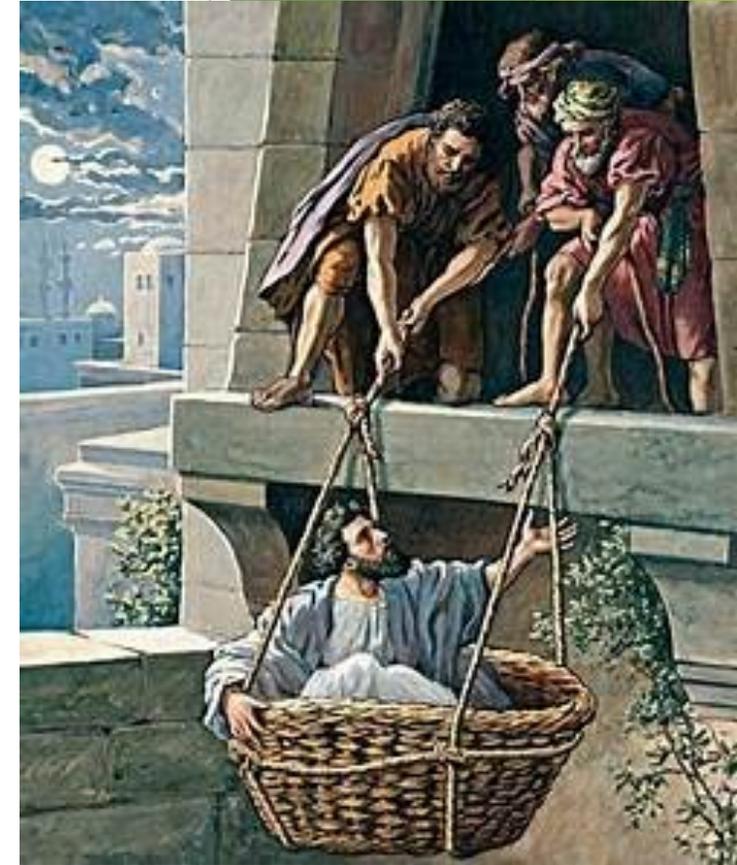
The suffering begins?

Acts 9:23-25

- ▶ After a long time had passed, the **Jews conspired to kill him**, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. Now they were keeping watch on the gates day and night so as to kill him, ²⁵ but his disciples took him one night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.
- ▶ Galatians 1:17-18 says Paul/Saul spent 3 years in Damascus.
- ▶ Jewish opposition is said here to be the reason for leaving. That was the case in many places in Acts.
- ▶ In 2 Corinthians 11:32 Paul adds that the governor under Aretas guarded the city so they might seize him. He has enemies in high places.

An escape with a little help of his friends

- ▶ *but his disciples took him one night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. (9:25)*
- ▶ Not only do his disciples come to his aid in an attempt to save his life, but this does show that in a relatively short time, Saul has indeed made some converts and disciples in Damascus.



Acts 9:26-30 On to Jerusalem

- ▶ ²⁶ When he arrived in Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. ²⁷ Then Barnabas took charge of him and brought him to the apostles, and he reported to them how on the way he had seen the Lord and that he had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ He moved about freely with them in Jerusalem, and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ He also spoke and debated with the Hellenists, but they tried to kill him. ³⁰ And when the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him on his way to Tarsus.

Saul's first journey back to Jerusalem

- ▶ Acts reports at least 6 visits to Jerusalem.
- ▶ Barnabas acts as a mediator between Saul and the Jerusalem Christian community.
- ▶ This visit is described by Paul in Gal 1:18.
- ▶ In Galatians 1:18 says that he went to see Peter and spent 15 days with Peter at that time.

Who is Barnabas?

His given name was Joseph. The name “Barnabas” means son of encouragement, it was a nickname.

In Acts 4:36 he is called a Levite and a Cyprian (from Cyprus).

In Acts 4:37 he sold a field and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

Barnabas vouches for Saul to the Jerusalem Church. (Acts 9:26-31)

In Acts 11 he is sent to Antioch by the Jerusalem Church. He is called a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.(Acts 11:23-24)

Barnabas looks for Saul to assist him with the Church in Antioch. (Acts 11:25)

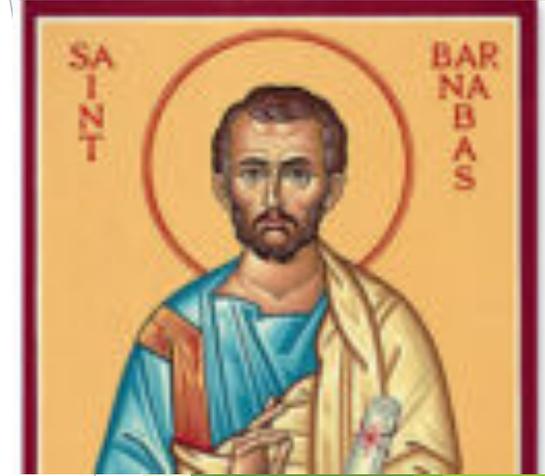
Paul and Barnabas settle down tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Acts 15 and Galatians 2.

More on Barnabas

Paul and Barnabas have a disagreement and part ways in Acts 15. They argue over *whether or not to include John Mark on a journey. John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas.*

Clement of Alexandria believes Barnabas was one of the 70 or 72 sent out by Jesus in Luke 10.

Tertullian called him the author of Hebrews.
(disputed)



Acts 9:31

- ▶ The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was at peace. It was being built up and walked in the fear of the Lord, and with the consolation of the holy Spirit it grew in numbers.
- ▶ This is a bit of a summary. There was peace, in part, because the persecutions by Saul had ceased. In our next lesson Peter goes to some of the areas that had already heard the Word.

Quick Review

On his way to arrest Christians in Damascus, Saul is struck blind, is surrounded by bright light and hears the voice of the risen Jesus say

“Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting me?”

Saul is led to Damascus and is blind, prays and fasts for 3 days.

The Lord sends Ananias to lay hands on Saul, heal him, and then baptize him. The Lord calls Saul an “instrument”.

Saul begins preaching and after three years has Jews plot to kill him. Saul’s disciples help him escape Damascus by lowering him over the city wall in a basket so he need not pass through the guarded city gates.

Review

Saul returns to Jerusalem but finds the Jewish Christians there are afraid of him.

Barnabas intercedes for him and finally Saul does continue to evangelize in Jerusalem.

Galatians says Saul spent 15 days with Peter at this time.

Again Saul angers Hellenists in Jerusalem. He leaves Jerusalem for Tarsus.

Jerusalem, Samaria Judea and Galilee Christian Communities are at peace.

Lessons Learned

- ▶ The Lord's ways are mysterious to us at times, but He can take the strengths and gifts of even reluctant men and women and use them for the good of the Church.
- ▶ Barnabas was a mediator between men. These qualities are essential in politically and religiously charged environments.
- ▶ A strong assertive voice is both a blessing and a curse in the case of Saul/Paul.
- ▶ In this lesson we saw redemption following prayer and fasting. We saw a strong opinionated man transformed into a warrior for Christ through the words of Jesus Christ and His faithful disciples in Damascus.

Let us Pray

- ▶ St. Barnabas, you were extremely influential in the early Church and helped shaped Christian thought and practice. Pray for the Church today, that we may continue in our traditions and hand on the faith to future generations. St. Barnabas, you were an eloquent and effective preacher; pray that all our preachers may be unafraid to preach Christ crucified and the truths of our faith. St. Barnabas, you died for the sake of the Name; pray that we may also be willing to dedicate our lives to God. Amen.
- ▶ St. Barnabas, pray for us!