

**9:19 Now for several days he [Saul] was with the disciples who were at Damascus,
9:20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."**

9:21 And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"

9:22 But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

9:23 And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,

9:24 but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;

9:25 but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

9:26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

9:27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

Historically, Paul's trip to Jerusalem may have been several years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18-20). It is also unclear how many apostles Paul had seen. In Galatians 1:18-19 he says that he only met Peter and James; however, this may be referring to an extended private conversation or that these men represented the whole group. Whatever the case, when he did try to join the disciples in Jerusalem, he was met with skepticism.

The transformation of Saul was so dramatic people were astonished; they couldn't believe that he who was trying to destroy the church was now proclaiming Christ!

Barnabas, however, sided with Saul and testified of his bold preaching about Jesus. It must have taken a man who was greatly respected to convince the church that Paul was really a Christian. Stott comments, "thank God for Ananias who introduced Saul to the fellowship in Damascus, and for Barnabas who did the same thing for him later in Jerusalem. But for them, and the welcome they secured for him, the whole course of Church history might have been different" (Stott, 178).

In this section Stott mentions four aspects of Paul's preaching that stand out:

1. It was Christ centered. In Damascus Saul preached that Jesus was the son of God (9:20) and proved that He was the Christ (9:22).
2. It was in the power of the Holy Spirit (9:17). Men could not deny, resist, or refuse Paul's words. In 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 Paul said, "our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

3. It was courageous. He spoke in the very synagogues to which the high priest had written letters authorizing Christians be arrested (9:2, 20, 27). Isa. 40:29: He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power.
4. It was costly. He suffered for the cause of Christ (9:16, 23–24, 29; 22:17–18).

We also see that from the time he was converted, he joined himself with the people of God. True conversion plants the family instinct into the person.

9:28 And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

9:29 And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death.

Saul was ministering in Jerusalem, contending boldly for the Gospel, though he was still relatively unknown by the church at large in that region (Gal. 1:22).

9:30 But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

9:31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

The obvious meaning of verse 31 is that the persecution ceased because the persecutor had been converted. The impact of Paul's conversion upon the church follows:

- 1) The church enjoyed peace.
- 2) The church was built up.
- 3) The church feared God.

The fear of the Lord is that sense of awe that the Lord God is infinitely holy and infinitely powerful and may not be trifled with. He is free to break in with indescribable, heart-stopping suddenness and power whenever and wherever he pleases.

The fear of the Lord is what the disciples felt when Jesus had stilled the storm and when Ananias and Sapphira had dropped dead. You do not make light of this God. You do not dally with him or take his name in jest or treat him as marginal or negligible in life. He is living and powerful and unstoppable and infinitely holy and wills the glory of his Father with white hot passion. You humble yourself, as Peter says, under his mighty hand. That was the atmosphere of the early church in which Jesus broke in . . . (Piper, <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/jesus-still-turns-things-around>).

- 4) The church was comforted in the Holy Spirit.

The promise of John 14 was being felt; the presence of the Holy Spirit brought blessing to the church.

5) The church continued to increase.

“The multiplication of the disciples kept pace with the peace, the edification, the walking in the fear of the Lord, the comfort of the Holy Spirit. The blood of the martyrs was already becoming the seed of the church. Stephen had not borne his witness in vain” (A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures).

In sum, John Piper brings this passage to light for us. He says:

So suddenly, out of the blue, he takes the key player in the persecution of his people and turns him totally around on the Damascus road. The Saul who was breathing out threats and murders against Christians doesn't just drop dead—which would have been a big enough reversal for the enemy—he gets converted to Christianity. And not just converted, but wildly converted, beyond anybody's imagination. So converted that he turns totally around—from being the worst enemy of Christianity to the strongest advocate and most powerful missionary for Christianity.

Luke drives this home by showing the persecutor becoming the persecuted. First, in verse 23, Luke tells us that the Jews in Damascus plotted to kill him. The hunter becomes the hunted. And he escapes (v. 25) in a basket through the wall. Second, in verse 29, Luke tells us that the Hellenists in Jerusalem were seeking to kill Saul. The hunter becomes the hunted. And he escapes by taking a ship to Tarsus.

And the upshot of this amazing turn around? Verse 31: "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up."

Nobody would have dreamed it could happen—and happen so suddenly. Persecution, violence, conspiracy, suspicion, scattering—and then suddenly, out of the blue, Jesus turns things around. That's the way he is and that is the way we should think about life. (Piper, www.desiringgod.org/sermons/jesus-still-turns-things-around)

When Paul reflected on his conversion, he traced it to the grace of God. In Galatians 1:15-16 he says, “But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and *called me through His grace*, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles. . .”

9:32-12:25 transitions from Peter to Paul, from Jerusalem to Antioch, from outreach to Jews to Gentile inclusion. Peter begins the unit, still active in healing and raising people from the dead (9:32-43). Next comes the section's dominant unit, the conversion of Cornelius's house, an event that requires visions from God on both sides to bring things together. It also includes one of the main speeches in Acts, where scripture recedes from being cited but the theology of what God is doing through Jesus is fully expressed (10:1-43). The reaction to Gentile inclusion is not automatic, so Peter must explain to Jerusalem how it happened. The short answer is that God brought about this inclusion (11:1-18). We also obtain a glimpse of the church in Antioch, to which Barnabas brings Saul from Tarsus, and Agabus leads the church through a prophetic word to provide famine relief for Jerusalem (11:19-30). The church

outside Israel is caring for the church there. Finally, during the persecution in Jerusalem, James, not the Lord's brother but the brother of John, is slain. Peter is also arrested, but the apostle is spared through a miraculous release by God. God rescues Peter from Herod, whose arrogant speech leads to God's judgment against him (12:1-23). A summary about the church's health closes the unit, as is always the case in Acts (12:24). God is protecting as the church is suffering but growing (Bock, 374).

9:32 Now it came about that as Peter was traveling through all those parts, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

9:33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed.

9:34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; arise, and make your bed." And immediately he arose.

9:35 And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Aeneas was a man who had been paralyzed and confined to a bed for nearly 8 years. Peter heals him in the name of Jesus and tells him to rise. Peter was an instrument of Christ, doing His works. The healing lays the groundwork for conversions to the Lord in Lydda (9:35).

9:36 Now in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did.

9:37 And it came about at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room.

Tabitha was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did. In Acts 10:38 Jesus is described in a similar way; He was a man "who went about doing good." "Doing good" was important for the early Christian church. Good works were characteristics of the Christian life since Christians partake of the life of the Christ who did good works. In James 2:18 James says, "I will show you my faith by my works." Then he says, "faith without works is dead" (Ja. 2:26). Ephesians 2:10 says that we were "created in Christ Jesus for good works." Tabitha was well known for her acts of mercy and charitable giving which identified her as a follower of Christ. It appears in verse 39 that the good that she did was in making garments for the poor. Through her works she mirrored Christ.

The name Tabatha is Aramaic and translates into the Greek word Dorcas (which meant "gazelle").

Dorcas became sick and died. Her body had been washed in preparation for burial and was placed in an upper room. In Judaism burial of the dead took place before sunset.

9:38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, entreating him, "Do not delay to come to us."

9:39 And Peter arose and went with them. And when he had come, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.

9:40 But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

9:41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

9:42 And it became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

Peter met the weeping widows and then prayed for Dorcas. Jesus heard his prayers and Dorcas opened her eyes. Her healing became well known and led many to believe in the Lord.

Stott observes how Peter's miracles authenticated him as an apostle of Jesus Christ (183):

1. Both miracles followed the example of Jesus. Aeneas' healing is similar to the paralytic that Jesus healed in Capernaum. Jesus, *in His own name*, said, "I say to you, 'take up your mat and go home'" (Mk. 2:11). The man immediately rose just as Aeneas did. Likewise, the raising of Tabitha recalls the raising of Jairus's daughter. In both cases people were asked to leave the room. Both of the dead had their hands touched and the words spoken to the dead person were almost identical. If Peter spoke Aramaic this occasion, only a single letter would have been different. In Aramaic Peter would have said, "*Tabitha koum*;" whereas in Mark 5:41 Jesus said to the girl He raised from the dead, "*Talitha koum*" ("Little girl, get up!"). The miracles recorded by Luke are written in such a way that they are endorsements of Peter's apostolic office. He is echoing in his apostolic ministry what his Savior did in His earthly ministry. This is why Paul could say to the Corinthians, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Cor. 12:12; also Heb. 2:3-4). The miracles said, "Here are the authenticated representatives of the risen Christ."
2. Both miracles were performed by Peter but the power was attributed to Jesus. Peter said, "Jesus Christ heals you!" (9:34, 40; compare Acts 3:12 & 16; 14:9-18). The attitude of the apostles was the same as John the Baptist's who said, "I must decrease but Christ must increase" (Jn. 3:30).
3. Stott also sees both miracles as signs of salvation. He points out that the verb "get up" in verses 34 and 40 is the verb (*ἀνίστημι - anistemi*) which is used by Luke of God raising Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24; 3:26). It is a resurrection word. Jesus' resurrection and Tabitha's raising are signs of new life.
4. Both miracles resulted in the glory of Christ; they resulted in people coming to faith (9:35, 42).

9:43 And it came about that he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain tanner, Simon.

Peter stayed in Joppa a few days with Simon, the tanner. Because Simon worked with the carcasses of dead animals, his occupation was considered unclean.