

Terrorist to Evangelist

Acts 9:10-25

Saul of Tarsus traveled to Damascus “Bold as a Lion”.

He went into Damascus “Blind as a Bat”.

He was let out of Damascus like a “Bucket or Basket of Trash”.

Not a very **auspicious** beginning for the man who is credited for the early, fast growth of the Christian movement and would end up writing the greater portion of our New Testament.

Last week, as we moved into Acts 9 we began our look at the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He was a man on a mission; a mission to destroy the Name of Jesus and wipe out all of His followers from the face of the map. Saul was a **terrorist of the worst type** – a “**Religious Terrorist**”. Thinking he was serving God, when all of the time he was following his own evil heart, and headed for the great judgment of God.

Saul needed to be converted, He needed to be transformed by the power of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

During the early First Century, Damascus and Syria in general began to prosper as a province of Rome. The city was at the crossroads between trade routes: the north-south route connecting Asia-Minor with Egypt, and the east-west cross-desert route connecting Lebanon with the Euphrates river valley. Trade routes from southern Arabia, Palmyra, Petra, and the silk routes from China all converged on Damascus as a caravan city, and the Barada River which ran right through the middle of the city supplied more than sufficient water for the growing population.

Damascus was a magnificent city, filled with luxuries from around the known world, to satisfy every Roman demand and desire.

The city had been completely redesigned by the Romans after Pompey conquered the region. When compared to the size of the entire ancient city, the Temple of Jupiter was enormous, remains can be seen even today. Right in the middle of present day Damascus, the ancient Old Town portion still retains the rectangular shape of a Roman city, with its two main axes: the Cardo (north-south), and the Decumanus Maximus (east-west); the Decumanus Maximus was also known as the Via Recta, or the Straight Street.¹

¹ <http://romeartlover.tripod.com/Damasco1.html> via https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damascus#cite_note-romeartlover-16

In 1867 when Mark Twain visited Damascus he wrote: *"The street called Straight is straighter than a corkscrew, but not as straight as a rainbow. St. Luke is careful not to commit himself; he does not say it is the street which is straight, but "the street which is called Straight". It is a fine piece of irony; it is the only facetious remark in the Bible, I believe."*²

It was there on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, where the conversion of Saul of Tarsus took place. As he neared the great city of Damascus, he was struck down and blinded by the magnificent, overwhelming glory of God through the presence of Jesus Christ Himself. And after his conversation with Jesus and his conversion to the Truth of Christ, his hatred and boldness toward destruction was removed and he was led as a blind man...

⁸ ...by the hand and brought into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

We will pick up the event at that point in verse 10

Acts 9

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."

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."

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."

Those three days of blindness, fasting and praying must have seemed an eternity as Saul waited for an answer from the Lord. But, it was during these three days that the Lord was also working on another individual there in Damascus. A Jewish convert to Christianity; one who would have been a primary target for the hatred of the previous mindset of Saul; a man by the name of Ananias.

Do you hear the fear and the doubt in Ananias' voice? *"Lord, couldn't **he** have seen in a vision a man called **Bill or John**? Why Ananias?"* Okay, maybe that's MY version of the conversation. But Ananias did question the Lord's logic in all of this.

² <http://romeartlover.tripod.com/Damasco1.html>

"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."

He had already heard that Saul was on his way to wreak havoc among the Believers in Damascus. Perhaps he had already planned with his family and friends on how to deal with the persecution and terror headed their way. But God...

God had another plan.

"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."

Isn't it amazing to think that our God **had a plan for Saul all along**? Saul was *a chosen vessel of God* even before he was born. ***It just took him a while to stop long enough to listen to God.*** Once God got his attention, his whole world changed. And for Ananias too; it seems from what Luke tells us here, Ananias was a man who communed with God and apparently had been faithful to God for a while. You don't get assignments like this from God until you have proven yourself. And, Ananias was faithful...

Acts 9

*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.

*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.***

Can you imagine the tenseness in the room as Ananias walked in and met Saul? But, there was also a boldness in Ananias as he **took God at His Word: *Brother Saul.***

**Those had to be strange words for the
former terrorist against Christianity to hear...
from a Christian.**

Ananias let Saul know that the **Lord Jesus was the active agent** in all of this: He was the One Saul heard on the road; He was the One who took Saul's sight; He was also the One to give it back again; and, He was the One who would **fill Saul's soul with the life giving power of the Holy Spirit**.

But, stop for a moment and consider: As for **Ananias, this is the last we hear of him**. We hadn't heard of him prior to chapter 9 and now by verse 17 he is out of the picture totally except for a couple of times Paul the Apostle speaks of him while sharing his testimony.

***Just as a side note:** There are people whom the Lord will bring in and out of our lives who will impact us in our faith. They may not have titles, they may not impress others, but God has a special place and purpose for them.*

Likewise, you too might be used to bring hope, encouragement, a word of truth, or the promise of the Gospel into someone's life who you may never see again. That's why we need to be listening... listening for the still small voice of the Lord, as He directs our lives.

As Saul received the words of Ananias, the **scales fell off his eyes**. He received back his sight *and he arose and was baptized*. Faithfulness and obedience. Saul believed the message and was obedient in his response. Once again here in Acts we see one who by faith believes in the Lord, then follows the Lord in baptism **as an outward sign of their inward change**.

The terrorist has become an evangelist. He had traveled to Damascus to persecute the Church, he ends up preaching Christ in the synagogues and throughout the town.

As Saul came to a saving knowledge of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, all the fullness of the scriptures he had **memorized** since childhood **came to life**. It was no longer a **religion**, he now had **a relationship with the God of Israel and the Savior of all mankind**. He now knew the Author of the scriptures.

Luke tells us there was **no hesitation** in Saul's testimony of Christ – *immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God*. And as he went into the synagogues and showed them the fullness of the verses read every Sabbath, he would share with his Jewish brethren the truth and completion of their faith. And *all who heard were amazed*, the former terrorist of Christianity was now proving through their own Jewish scriptures *that this Jesus is the Christ*.

As we look at the whole of Saul's life and testimony we find that at about this time there was a movement in Saul or Paul's life that Luke doesn't give us here in Acts. The Apostle Paul writes about it in Galatians where he says that **after his conversion he headed to Arabia** –

Gal. 1

¹⁶ ...I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.

Why did he go to Arabia, Paul doesn't tell us? Personally I feel it was a time for Saul to hear more directly from the Lord, as **the Lord formed his theology and doctrine**. It is through the writings of the Apostle that we receive the greatest portion of our Christian doctrine. One thing we do know from the passage in Galatians: during those three years in Arabia he *did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did (he) go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before (him)*.

It was the **Lord Himself who taught Saul**. The man who had been trained by the best in Israel was now under the direct tutelage of God Almighty. I believe he was taught the Word of God and given the mission of God during his time in Arabia. Then he came back to Damascus, even stronger in his understanding of scripture and even bolder in his proclamation of truth.

And what was the response as the great evangelist shared the Word of God?

Back here in Acts 9, Luke gives us the results beginning in verse 23 –

²³ Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.

*But, I thought this was the one
who caused the message of the Gospel
to spread throughout the known world?*

Yes, but for right now the one who was **once a terrorist is being terrorized**.

The one who **once persecuted is being persecuted**.

Although he is now on the right track, he has now become the prime target of the **one** who once controlled his life: **Satan** will try to do everything he can to stop the message and destroy the messenger.

²⁴ But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. ²⁵ Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.

A **pretty humble beginning** for a man who would be used by God in such a powerful way. But actually this was just the beginning of *how many things he must suffer for the Name of Jesus*.

Let me end this with the words of Warren Wiersbe:

Throughout his life, the great apostle was hated, hunted, and plotted against by both Jews and Gentiles (“in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles”—2 Cor. 11:26, NKJV). As you read the Book of Acts, you see how the opposition and persecution increase, until the apostle ends up a prisoner in Rome (Acts 13:45, 50; 14:19; 17:5, 13; 18:12; 20:3, 19; 21:10–11, 27ff). But he counted it a privilege to suffer for the sake of Christ, and so should we. “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).³

“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” That’s a sobering thought. It is also something that we need to remember as **representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ to a dark and dying world**. The truth will set people free, but not everyone is ready to receive that truth. They are caught up in the lies and the deceit of the enemy. They are forging full steam ahead on a journey they feel is right. But it is a journey that will lead them to stand before God as their Eternal Judge and not as their loving heavenly Father.

Saul thought he had it “*right*” for a great portion of his life. He was willing to do whatever it took to “*prove he was right*”. Even if it meant hurting others in the process.

As you and I look around the world today, as we go through the processes of our life and the testimony of our faith in Christ, we will be pressed and attacked by many who **feel** they are right and we’re all wrong.

Many today feel that Christians who stand for the Truth of God’s Word are actually the problem with the world today... that we are the divisive ones... that we are the non-tolerant ones... The unfortunate truth is, *they are blinded*, not physically, but **they are spiritually blinded by the falsehoods and lies they have embraced**. They have become **comfortable in the dark, while the Light becomes an irritant**.

The problem is, it’s too easy for us to move into an **attitude of hatred** for those who can be so violent in their disdain of the Truth. But we need to remember, **some of those who today are terrorist against the Truth can and will someday come to the Truth and be used by God as a proclaimer of the hope of the Gospel**.

I feel God still has more Sauls in this world. Sauls who He’s preparing to become Pauls. And who knows, perhaps He’s also preparing you to be an Ananias. We’ll look at Barnabus next week.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 441.