

ACTS

Chapter 9

The Conversion of Saul

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. 4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” 5 And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” 13 But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at 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 instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened.

9:1-22 Luke’s purpose, the schematic for the second volume of his work, and the arrangement of the elements of his story are already revealed in the pattern set in Acts 1:8. Six summary statements (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31) signal closure of one phase of the Word’s advancement from Jerusalem to Rome (and beyond) and the beginning of another. Luke selectively chooses events which portray the impact of the risen and exalted Christ on the world. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

In the section 9:32–12:24 the Word goes forth to the Gentiles. Sandwiched between the account of the Ethiopian eunuch’s conversion (8:26–40) and that of Cornelius (10:1–11:18) is the story of the conversion of St. Paul. Acts 9:1–22 is that story, with its dramatic rehearsal of one of the most astounding events in Christian history. “No single event,” writes F. F. Bruce, “apart from the Christ-event itself, has proved so determinant for the course of Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of Paul” (*Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, 75). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

9:1-2 *Search and Destroy*: The chapter begins “But Saul, still (*eti*) breathing threats and murder.” The definite article before Saul (called anaphora “pointing back”—BDF §260) and the use of *eti*

point back to 8:1–3. Saul was a key figure in the “great persecution” which broke out against the church following the death of Stephen. Paul tried to destroy the church, and aggressively so, going house by house to arrest and to imprison believers. With authorization from the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem (9:1), Saul sought the extradition of Christians from Damascus (150 miles from Jerusalem) threatening to imprison and kill them presumably for their offenses against the law. Note that while opponents of the Christians called them a sect (*hairesin*—Acts 24:14), the believers referred to themselves as “the Way” (*hē odos*—used absolutely, only in Acts, at 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14; and 24:22). Note also *hopōs* with the aorist subjunctive *agapēi* and the conditional clause *ean* with aorist subjunctive *heurēi* to refer to something which was pending in past time (see BDF §373 [3]). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

The church stands on the cusp of its extraordinary missionary expansion, bursting from the boundary of Judea to the Gentile world that hungered for salvation. (Emperor Augustus was forecast by the ancient world to be a savior.) For Luke, the Gospel is a message to be set on the stage of the whole universe (Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia, 1996] 106). The Pauline mission expansion starts on a dismal note of brutal repression and convicted unbelief by Saul. The Sanhedrin’s power of extradition is documented by Flavius Josephus (*Antiq.* 14.10.2). The Way was the earliest name for the followers of Jesus the Messiah. The Way and the Messiah were indistinguishable. To be in him was to be on the way (Jn 14:6). Damascus would have had several synagogues of the Diaspora. It is not surprising then that fleeing followers of the Way (Acts 8:1) should arrive in Damascus. This text (9:1–22) is paralleled in Acts 22:3–16 and 26:9–18 and confirms the paradigmatic character of the conversion of Paul (cf Phil 4:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 14, Part 1)

9:1 Saul. Introduced at the stoning of Stephen (7:58), he was born in Tarsus and trained under Gamaliel (22:3). (CSB)

breathing threats and murder. We do not know that Saul was directly involved in the death of anyone other than Stephen (8:1), but there appear to have been similar cases (22:4; 26:10). (CSB)

Saul was intoxicated with hatred. We do not have a specific report that he actually killed Christians, though those he imprisoned were executed (22:4) (TLSB)

“Still breathing out murderous threats” refers us back to Saul’s dragging Christians off to jail in Acts 8:1–3 and his part in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54–8:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

high priest. Probably Caiaphas and the members of the Sanhedrin, who had authority over Jews both in Judea and elsewhere. (CSB)

9:2 Damascus. Located in the Roman province of Syria, it was the nearest important city outside Palestine. It also had a large Jewish population. The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus was about 150 miles, four to six days’ travel. (CSB)

Saul was intent on halting the spread of the Gospel. We are not told which disciple spread the message to Damascus, a Syrian city on a plateau (2,300 ft above sea level). It was watered by the rivers Abana and Pharpar (2Ki 5:12). (TLSB)

the Way. A name for Christianity occurring a number of times in Acts (16:17; 18:25–26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; see 2Pe 2:2). Jesus called himself “the way” (Jn 14:6). (CSB)

Name for Christianity; only in Ac. The origin of the term remains obscure. (TLSB)

The term *tēs hodou*, “the Way,” refers to the early church uniquely in Acts (here and 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). At Acts 19:23 Luke assumes the reader knows the term, but since the speeches of chapters 22 and 24 are directed to the Jews and Felix, it is apparent that others also used the title to refer to the church. Michaelis argues that the term stems from “the ways which God Himself takes. In 18:25f the reference is to his whole plan of salvation, in 13:10 to its fulfillment through mission” (TDNT 5.90). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

bring them bound to Jerusalem. Where the full authority of the Sanhedrin could be exercised in trial for either acquittal or death. (CSB)

9:3-9 *Abrupt Interruption:* At high noon (22:6) on his way to Damascus, Saul was stopped in his tracks by the risen Christ through a sudden and great (22:6) flash of light (here *peristraptō* and in 26:13 *perilampō*) and a voice (*phōnē*—cf. 7:31; 10:13; Lk 3:22; Jn 12:28). Note what BDF calls epanadiplosis, repetition of a word for emphasis: “Saul, Saul” (§493 [1]). In the Old Testament, the “voice” (the rabbinic “Bath Qol,” or “Daughter of the Voice”) was characteristic of divine revelation (e.g., Ex. 3:1–6; Is. 6:8). Saul was physically driven to the ground by the force of the revelation of God’s glory. The voice of the risen Jesus, whom Saul first calls “sir” or “Lord”, makes it clear that Paul’s persecution was not merely against the church, but against the person of Jesus himself. Thus, Saul’s zeal for the cause of God (in his view) had turned into an attack on God who raised Jesus from the dead. He now comes face to face with the sovereign and gracious will of the risen Lord. He is now in no position to continue his plans, incapacitated by blindness and fear. He was literally “apprehended” (*katelēmphthēn*) by Christ (Phil 3:12), passive and helpless like a little child. Note the following from Ernst Haenchen’s commentary (*The Acts of the Apostles* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971], 322–23): “Saul is now thrown on the . . . guidance of the Lord. He who a moment ago was so powerful has now become utterly powerless The Christophany is over, the earthly action proceeds. Saul is lifted to his feet, being incapable of rising by himself. . . . Such a pitiful state in which the terror of the Christians makes its entry.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

In his letters Paul viewed the “Damascus Road” encounter as an appearance of the risen Christ (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; Gal 1:16), not a psychological experience. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

Some interpreters treat Saul’s experience as a model for Christian conversion, as though every person has to experience a crisis in order to become a Christian. This is misleading. Though God can and does work in people’s lives through crises, conversion is always the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Saul’s conversion actually takes place in vv 17–18 as he receives God’s Word and Sacrament. Let no one question your salvation because you came to faith quietly, without some dramatic experience. What matters is trust in Jesus as the Savior, which is truly what made Saul a Christian. (TLSB)

9:3-6 What first transpires is called the Damascus Road experience of Paul, perhaps not yet a “conversion.” The Lord begins only as a threat to the threatening Saul. The Law must do its peculiar work. At high noon (22:6; 26:13) the Lord comes to rescue his body, the church, of which he is the head. Both the repeated address, “Saul, Saul,” and the prostration of the apostle are characteristic of divine intervention and self-revelation (1 Sam 3:4; Ex 3:4). Jesus uses the divine self-designation *eigwv eijmi* to identify himself to the apostle, recollecting the call of

Moses (Ex 3:14). Paul, as one abnormally born (1 Cor 15:8), was confronted by the resurrected Christ in that moment. While the response, *kuvrie*, “sir,” may be ambiguous, still Saul immediately sees the implications of this revelation in confessing the one who has revealed himself (9:20, 22). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 14, Part 1)

9:3 *a light from heaven*. “About noon” (26:13). (CSB)

The Lord often used elements of nature to serve His purpose. (TLSB)

9:4 *why are you persecuting me?* To persecute the church is to persecute Christ, for the church is his body (see 1Co 12:27; Eph 1:22–23). (CSB)

Cf 26:14. Saul’s persecution of Jesus’ disciples was persecution of the Son of God. Believers are the “Body of Christ.” See p 1965. Luth: “When [the Word of God] strikes the heart, it is like a thunderbolt which overthrows even the most strongly fortified places by its force.... Paul hated the Gospel with such an obstinate heart that he was like an immovable rock. Yet he is shattered by the hammer of the Word. For ‘God kills and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up’ (1 Sam. 2:6)” (AE 3:348). (TLSB)

Several manuscripts have variant readings in vv 4–6 that appear to be copied from Acts 26:14, which refers to Saul kicking “against the goads.” The word *phōnēn* can mean either “voice” or “sound.” Here, because Paul hears words, it obviously means “voice.” In v 7, however, it could be translated either way. NIV has “sound,” perhaps because they could not “understand the voice,” as Paul relates in Acts 22:9. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

9:5-6 *Lord?* Not an expression of faith but of respect. Up to this moment, Saul was convinced that his mission pleased God. *I am Jesus*. The Lord answers Saul’s question concerning His identity by speaking and acting as God, directing Saul on where to go and saying no more. (TLSB)

9:5 *Who are you, Lord?* In rabbinic tradition such a voice from heaven would have been understood as the voice of God himself. The solemn repetition of Saul’s name and the bright light suggested to him that he was in the presence of deity. (CSB)

9:6-7 Paul is told that he will learn in Damascus the details of what he must do. When Paul relates the event for the benefit of King Agrippa (Acts 26:16–18), He has the voice explain the mission at this point, probably for the sake of understanding. Though at v 7 the men see no one, Acts 22:9 does reveal that they saw the light. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

9:7-9 It can hardly be accidental that after Paul falls down (cf 1 Cor 14:25) through the force of this divine confrontation, Luke uses the common term for the resurrection from the dead (*hjgevrqh*) or for those miraculously raised from the sickbed. The verb is in the emphatic position. The apostle has the sickness unto death, and only the Lord can raise him. Note also that Saul’s blindness and fast are three days. Saul is led to Damascus in a humiliating way, emphasizing his complete dependence on external help, and finally on God. (For a discussion of the “difficulties” presented by v 7 when compared to Acts 22:9, see F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, The International Commentary on the New Testament, reprint [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 197.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 14, Part 1)

9:7 *hearing a voice*. Those with Saul “heard the sound” but “did not understand” what the voice was saying (22:9; cf. Da 10:7). (CSB)

9:8-9 *he saw nothing*. Physical afflictions can turn an individual toward repentance and contrition (e.g., Zechariah’s muteness, Lk 1:20; Miriam’s leprosy, Nu 12:10). Saul’s murderous energy (v 1) contrasts with his meek dependence here. *neither ate nor drank*. The heavenly vision (26:19) may have driven Saul to fast as part of his repentance and contrition. Cf Ezr 9:5; Ne 1:4; Dn 9:3. (TLSB)

9:9 Saul’s three days of blindness and fasting may be symbolic of our Lord’s Triduum. “The three days might well bring home to Saul himself the reality of the baptismal significance of death, burial, and resurrection with Christ, which plays so prominent a part of his own theology” (*Peake’s Commentary*, p 898). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

9:10-16 *From Persecutor to Chosen Instrument*: God chooses a Christian man by the name of Ananias to seek Paul out. He was a devout man by the standards of Jewish law and well thought of by his contemporaries (see Acts 22:12). His address is known: “Straight Street” traversed Damascus from East to West and had colonnaded halls on both sides and imposing gates at each end (Haenchen, 323, note 7). Note: the term “vision” (*horama*) occurs 11 times in the New Testament, not once outside of Acts! (7:31; 9:10, 12; 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5; 12:9; 16:9, 10; 18:9). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

Ananias’ assignment is to enter the house of a man called Judas where Saul was staying and to lay hands on Saul so that he might regain his sight. Saul, too, by way of a vision, was informed about this and would be expecting him. Ananias expresses hesitation because it was well-known (*ēkousa apo pollōn* v 13) that Saul was a formidable man, with authoritative backing from the Jewish council.

Note: Christians are designated as “saints” and “those who call upon” the name of Jesus. In Acts Christians are also called “those being saved” (2:47), “disciples” (6:1), “saints” (9:13), “brothers” (9:30), believers (10:45), “Nazarene sect” (24:5), and perhaps “friends” (27:3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

9:10-12 Ananias likely was among a nascent Christian community that had sprung up in Damascus under influence from Galilee, just to the south (see Acts 22:12). He received a shocking instruction to lay hands on Saul, the destroyer of the church. God asks the impossible of his servants. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 14, Part 1)

9:10 *Ananias*. Mentioned elsewhere only in 22:12. His was a common name (5:1; 23:2). The Greek form is derived from the Hebrew name Hananiah, meaning “The LORD is gracious/shows grace” (see Da 1:6). (CSB)

One of the people Saul would have brought “bound to Jerusalem” (v 2). *Ananias*. Common name. Cf 5:1. *vision*. Prophesied in 2:17 (cf 10:9–16; 11:5). (TLSB)

vision - Luke uses the term *oroma*, “vision,” clearly setting this mode of communication apart from the confrontation on the road to Damascus. A. vision was a less direct revelation. The word is also used in v 12 of Paul’s seeing Ananias coming to him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

9:11-12 *street called Straight.* Major street in the city. Ananias's help for Saul illustrates how the Lord brings otherwise disparate people into fellowship through the Gospel. *he is praying.* Expression of his repentance. (TLSB)

9:11 *Straight Street.* Probably followed the same route of the long, straight street that today runs through the city from east to west. It is a decided contrast to the numerous crooked streets of the city. (CSB)

praying. Prayer is often associated with visions in Luke and Acts (see 10:9–11; Lk 1:10; 3:21; 9:28). (CSB)

9:13-14 Ananias offers a perfectly reasonable objection to the divine plan. However, he still addresses the Lord and thus awaits the Lord's response to the objection. To "call" on the name of the Lord here means to be a Christian (see also Acts 9:21; Rom 10:12; cf Gen 4:26). The one to whom we pray defines us Christians. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 14, Part 1)

9:13 Saul's reputation and his authorization to hunt down believers had reached Damascus, c 135 mi from Jerusalem. (TLSB)

9:15-16 These verses constitute a compact summary of Paul's entire life, purpose, and work henceforth: He is a "vessel" of God's choice (*skeuos eklogēs*—genitive of quality, BDF §165), selected for a task of which he was conscious from then on (Gal 1:15–17; Rom 1:1). In the metaphorical designation of Paul as *skeuos eklogēs* the instrumental character of *skeuos* predominates (s.v. *skeuos* *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981] 3:251.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

The Lord rejects Ananias's objection because his plans for Saul are bigger than any objection ever could be. Note the echo of the Gospel (Lk 21:12; also Ps 119:46). To be an apostle of the Lord requires acceptance of suffering. To bear Christ to the world is to share in his sufferings. In Luke the divine necessity of suffering is first of all Christ's (Lk 9:22; 17:25; 22:15; etc.), but it becomes the apostles' by extension (2 Cor 4:10–12; 6:4–10; 11:23–28). To endure for the name is to endure for Christ himself. To dishonor the name is to dishonor Christ himself. The call of Saul is a parallel to the Old Testament prophetic calls in that it does not depend on the merit of the one called; indeed it depends rather on the unworthiness of the one called and the graciousness of the one calling. Saul's call is different from the Old Testament in that he is himself an unbeliever and persecutor. He is the personal display of the radical grace of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 14, Part 1)

9:15 *chosen instrument.* The Lord often calls those considered least likely to serve His plan of salvation. Recall how the Lord directed Samuel in anointing David as Saul's successor (1Sm 16). *suffer for the sake of My name.* God's name is inseparable from His covenant of grace with humankind. (Cf Ac 4:12; Ezk 36:22; Rv 21:6.) Christ instructed His disciples regarding the cost of discipleship. The disciple is not above the teacher (Mt 10:24), and His disciples would be condemned by religious and civil authorities for His sake (Mt 10:17). (TLSB)

instrument - Skeuos, "instrument," is a general term for vessel, utensil, container, or equipment; it can even refer to God's weapons (Jer 27:25 LXX, corresponding to Jer 50:25 in Hebrew and English; on the term, see *TDNT* 7.359–65). Here it provides a vivid picture of God's use of Paul. "The metaphor often occurs [in the LXX] in connection with the art of the potter. Man esp[ecially] is the material which takes shape in the hand of him who creates and fashions

him.” At 2 Cor 4:7, regarding the treasure in earthen vessels, “the reference is not to the body bearing the soul but to the whole man bearing the message [of God].” The rabbis taught that people are instruments either of God or of Satan. In Apocalypse of Moses 16, “The devil says to the serpent in Paradise: ‘Be my tool.’” God then curses it, saying, “thou hast become a *skeuos axariston* [ungrateful vessel].” In Hos 8:8, God says Israel has become *cikali ean-rayfets bon*, “like an undesirable vessel.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

The word *eklogē* is a noun meaning “choosing, election.” It refers to people or items selected or chosen from among others, “especially of God’s selection of Christians” (BAGD 243a). The genitive construction with the noun—a Hebraism—makes it functionally equivalent to an adjective, “chosen.” The stress on God’s choosing emphasizes that God’s election and call to service is solely by grace. Saul may or may not be the best person for the task, but he is the one selected by God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

kings. Agrippa (26:1) and Caesar at Rome (25:11–12; 28:19). (CSB)

9:16 Luther: “All Christendom is a small group that must submit to, suffer, and bear more than all other people whatever grief the devil and the world can inflict on it. Now who, in view of what they appear to be and are subjected to, will recognize and learn that they are genuine Christians? Reason will surely not show this. The Holy Spirit must do so. He is called ‘the Spirit of truth’ because in spite of what they appear to be and are subjected to ... He strengthens and preserves hearts in the faith” (AE 24:358). (TLSB)

9:17-19a *Despised Enemy Becomes a Brother*: Luke’s narrative underlines the new situation in Christ: (1) Saul has now become a “brother” (v 17) instead of an enemy and persecutor (Phil 3:6) of the church; (2) Saul receives sight and the gift of the Holy Spirit upon Ananias’ touch; and (3) Saul refreshes himself with food. Note the imperfect *ērchou* and *en tēi hodōi* in v 17: “On the way to do in the followers of ‘the Way,’ Saul was turned around and set on the way” (William H. Willimon, *Acts* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1988] 77). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

Ananias addresses Saul as “brother.” Those who by adoption are brothers of the only begotten Son can only address one another as brother. It was the Lord’s will that Saul, yes, Saul, be saved. God’s heart was brimming with compassion for this chief of sinners, as for all sinners, even sinners like us (1 Tim 1:15). The Lord himself sent Ananias. The Lord intended that Saul see and receive the Holy Spirit, and to that end he was baptized. “We cannot assume that he (Luke) intended his readers to infer that the Spirit’s filling preceded baptism” (James Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Epworth Commentaries, I. H. Jones, gen. ed. [London: Epworth Press, 1996] 124). For a more complete description of this meeting between Saul and Ananias, see Acts 22:12–14. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 14, Part 1)

9:17 *Jesus, who appeared to you*. The Damascus road experience was not merely a vision. The resurrected Christ actually appeared to Saul, and on this fact Saul based his qualification to be an apostle (1Co 9:1; 15:8). (CSB)

Ananias shows remarkable faith when he addresses Saul as “brother.” But he is still restrained; though he knows the vision showed him laying hands on him and restoring his sight, he simply announces that the Lord “has sent me so that you may see again,” and adds the result of Baptism, “and be filled with the Holy Spirit” At Acts 22:13 Paul recalls him saying, “Receive your sight!” and includes a brief sermonette with the invitation to be baptized. That passage is a part of Paul’s

defense, which is stronger with a clear miracle via Ananias. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

9:18 *scales*. Similar description appears in Tobit 3:17. There is also a spiritual healing, allowing true insight of God in Christ. *baptized*. Baptism clothes the believer with Christ, removes former barriers, and bestows the Spirit. Cf 2:38–39; Mt 28:19–20; Jn 3:5–6; Rm 6:1–4; 1Co 6:11; Gal 3:27–28; Eph 4:1. (TLSB)

9:1–19a Jesus confronts Saul and converts him through the Gospel and Baptism. Though Saul was convinced of his righteous mission of persecution, he learned that true righteousness comes only through Christ. All we are and all we do depends on His blessing and calling. • “Praise for the light from heaven And for the voice of awe; Praise for the glorious vision The persecutor saw. O Lord, for Paul’s conversion, We bless Your name today; Come shine within our darkness, And guide us on our way.” Amen. (LSB 517:12) (TLSB)

Saul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. 20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

9:19b–22 The suddenness (*eutheōs*) of Saul’s unprecedented about-face from persecutor to missionary causes amazement and incredulity. When visiting the synagogues, he seeks not to ravage (*portheō*—cf. Gal 1:13, 23!) but to preach Jesus (note the imperfect *ekērussen* denoting continuous activity). Luke uses *elēluthei* (pluperfect, see BDF §347 [3]) to indicate that Saul’s initial purpose is a thing of the past. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

The content of Saul’s proclamation is that Jesus is the Son of God, a term used only here of Jesus in Acts. Note that Psalm 2:7 is cited in Paul’s sermon in 13:33. Applied to Jesus, the term presents him as the true representative of the Israel of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ex 4:22; Dt 32: 6; Jer 31:19; Hos 11:1). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

The text concludes on a confident, forward-looking note. Paul became strong, confounding the Jews with his ability to prove from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 8, Part 1)

There is no reason Saul could not have gone into Arabia (Nabataean Arabia was just to the north of Damascus) at this time (Gal 1:17). In his first proclamation, *eikhvrussen*, Saul preached that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah, each being entailed in the confession of the other. Paul’s preaching was made the more shocking because of the content of the rhetorical questions, which emphatically require an affirmative answer (v 21). As a zealous student of the Old Testament, Saul would have been well-equipped to argue from its pages showing that Jesus is the Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 14, Part 1)

9:19b Cf vv 20–22. Christ’s disciples received Saul into fellowship due to sincere faith. (TLSB)

9:20 *immediately*. Following his baptism. (CSB)

The Holy Spirit breathed new life into him who formerly breathed threats and murders. (TLSB)

synagogues. It became Saul's regular practice to preach at every opportunity in the synagogues (13:5; 14:1; 17:1–2, 10; 18:4, 19; 19:8). (CSB)

he is the Son of God. Saul's message was a declaration of what he himself had become convinced of on the Damascus road: Christ's deity and Messiahship. (CSB)

"The Son of God" is part of the Davidic strain from 2 Sam 7:13–14, "He will be my Son." "Jesus is the embodiment of all that Israel was designed to be" (Fred Danker, *Creeeds in the Bible*, p 37). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 2, Part 2)

9:21 *were amazed* – The disciples are not prepared to obey the Lord because they are afraid of their persecutor. This shows a misdirected fear of the persecutor rather than God (cf. Luke 12:4–5). It also shows the problem that humans have in keeping up with the Lord's work. The Lord's work is revealed through events that over-throw human expectations. Humans calculate the future on the basis of their normal experience. These calculations leave them unprepared for the appearance of the Overruler, who negates human plans and works the unexpected. This is a problem not only for the rejecters of Jesus but also for the church, which, as our narrative indicates, is led by the Lord into situations beyond its fathoming. (Tannehill)

who called upon this name – To call on the Lord is to believe in Him and to pray. Cf 2:21; Rm 10:9, 14; 2Tm 2:22; 1Pt 1:17. (TLSB)

9:22 *confounded the Jews* – Marking Saul's separation from his former beliefs and from that community. (TLSB)

proving that Jesus was the Christ – OT prophecies were fulfilled in Christ. (TLSB)

9:19b–22 The Holy Spirit opened Saul's eyes and heart to forgiveness through Christ so he boldly confessed His name to his fellow Jews. Today, trust that the Lord is able to change people's lives—even people you regard as utterly lost and despicable. How great is our Lord and His grace! • Father, as Your Holy Spirit opened Saul's heart to the Gospel, open my heart, that I might believe and make a fearless testimony of Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Saul Escapes from Damascus

23 **When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.**

9:23–24 Saul, who formerly hunted Christ's disciples, would himself be hunted. Cf Mt 24:9. (TLSB)

9:23 *when many days.* Three years (Gal 1:17–18). It is probable that the major part of this period was spent in Arabia, away from Damascus, though the borders of Arabia extended to the environs of Damascus. (CSB)

the Jews plotted to kill him. Upon his return to Damascus, the governor under Aretas gave orders for his arrest (2Co 11:32). The absence of Roman coins struck in Damascus between A.D. 34 and 62 may indicate that Aretas was in control during that period. (CSB)

9:25 *his disciples*. Term used for those who followed a prophet. (TLSB)

lowered him in a basket. See 2Co 11:33 (cf. Jos 2:15; 1Sa 19:12). (CSB)

opening in the wall – Saul’s escape was really very simple. Some of the houses that adjoined the wall around the city had windows that were high above the wall itself. From such a window, strong and loving hands lowered Saul to the ground in a basket. (LL)

First of several recorded accounts of Saul being delivered from death. Christians should not seek out martyrdom, but seek to honor and proclaim the Gospel, whether by life or death. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Paul blushed not to be let down in a basket over a wall ... and so to escape the hands of those who were seeking his life. He escaped not to spare his life, but to give place to wrath; not to avoid death, but to attain life” (*SLSB*, p 136). (TLSB)

9:23–25 The Christians show sincere faith by welcoming Saul, supporting his teaching of salvation through Christ. For the sake of the Gospel today, support and defend the witness of your brothers and sisters in Christ. The Lord your Savior is your defender. • Father, through Your Word, strengthen my faith in Christ. Make me, like those who assisted Saul, faithful in serving the proclamation of the Gospel. Amen. (TLSB)

Saul in Jerusalem

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. 31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

9:26 Cf vv 1–2, 13. Underscores the savagery with which Saul executed his campaign of persecution against Christ’s disciples. (TLSB)

he came to Jerusalem. From Gal 1:19 we learn that all the apostles were away except Peter and James, the Lord’s brother. James was not one of the Twelve, but he held a position in Jerusalem comparable to that of an apostle. (CSB)

9:27 *Barnabas*. Barnabas validated Saul’s conversion, emphasizing that Saul had seen and heard the Lord. Cf vv 3–19; 1Jn 1:1–4. (TLSB)

Barnabas begins to live up to his designation as “son of consolation.” He acts as mediator between Paul and the Jerusalem leaders. (Sacra)

9:28 *in and out among them*. The disciples in Jerusalem received Saul into fellowship (cf 1Jn 1:6–7). (TLSB)

9:29 *He spoke and disputed.* Formerly Saul was arguing against Christ; now he is forcefully presenting Jesus as the Messiah. (CSB)

seeking to kill him – When Saul returns to Jerusalem, he assumes the role of the fallen Stephen, debating with Hellenistic Jews, who plot to kill him. Later Paul will face accusations similar to the accusations against Stephen (21:28). (Tannehill)

9:30 *brothers.* Again, Christ’s disciples ensured Saul would escape. (TLSB)

Caesarea. C 23 mi S of Mount Carmel; built (25–13 BC) by Herod the Great; Roman capital of that region (cf 18:22; 21:8, 16; 23:23, 33; 25). (TLSB)

Tarsus. Saul’s birthplace. (CSB)

Chief city of Cilicia on Cydnus River; home of Paul (cf 9:11; 21:39; 22:3). (TLSB)

sent him off to Tarsus – A small but trusted delegation was selected and given the responsibility of getting Saul safely to the seaport town of Caesarea and probably putting him on a ship for his hometown of Tarsus. Luke tells us nothing about why Saul went home to Tarsus, nor what he did during the eight years he stayed there. There Saul remained until Barnabas came to Tarsus to bring Saul back into the picture. (LL)

9:31 When Saul, former persecutor of Christians, was converted, peace returned to the Church. The Lord ended the first serious persecution. (TLSB)

the church. The whole Christian body, including Christians in the districts of Judea, Galilee and Samaria. The singular thus does not here refer to the various congregations but to the church as a whole (see note on 5:11). (CSB)

comfort of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Spirit is particularly noted throughout the book of Acts (see 13:2). This is why the book is sometimes called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

Luke points us again to the source of power and growth for the Lord’s church. It is the immersion in the Word through which the Holy Spirit matures our faith, so that the disciples’ lives were living reflections of Christ for all the world to see. (LL)

9:26–31 Due to Saul’s past, Christians are suspicious of him. Due to his new faith, enemies of the Christian faith plot to kill him. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit brings Saul to other believers who help him escape. Through the power of the Gospel, the Church continues to grow. The Lord will likewise watch over the future of your congregation. Proclaim Christ! The Savior will bless and keep you. • Father, thank You for allowing me to hear the lifesaving news of the Gospel and to share in the fellowship of believers. Amen. (TLSB)

The Healing of Aeneas

32 Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. **33** There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. **34** And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose. **35** And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

9:32 *went here and there* – From the way Luke introduces Peter’s activity, it would seem that this is how all the apostles are occupied. By now there were undoubtedly many congregations scattered throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. The apostles were the appointed teachers and preachers of the Word. (LL)

saints – Again, the beautiful word “saints” is used by Luke when he refers to believers. In every community where they had settled, they lived lives worthy of the calling they had received (Eph. 4:1) and through such living attracted their neighbors to Christ. (LL)

Lydda. A town two or three miles north of the road connecting Joppa and Jerusalem. Lydda is about 12 miles from Joppa. (CSB)

Lydda. Town in plain of Sharon, 11 mi SE of Joppa. (TLSB)

The modern city Lod, which was the OT name for the place, is the site of Israel’s Ben Gurion International Airport. (PBC)

9:33 *Aeneas*. Since Peter was there to visit the believers, Aeneas was probably one of the Christians. (CSB)

paralyzed. Cf Mt 9:2; Mk 2:3; Lk 5:18. (TLSB)

9:35 *Sharon*. The fertile plain of Sharon runs about 50 miles along the Mediterranean coast, roughly from Joppa to Caesarea. The reference here, however, may be to a village in the neighborhood of Lydda instead of to a district (an Egyptian papyrus refers to a town by that name in Palestine). (CSB)

turned to the Lord – Since the Gospel had not yet been written, the Spirit used those miracles to attest to the truth of the apostles’ teaching and preaching. (LL)

9:32–35 Aeneas, paralyzed for eight years, is healed through the power of the Gospel. Seeing this miracle, the residents of Lydda and Sharon repent and believe in the Lord. As God grants you opportunity, share the love of Jesus by caring for the sick. His abiding care will sustain you in every need. • Father, thank You for healing me from the paralysis and death of sin and giving me the hope of eternal life. Amen. (TLSB)

Dorcas Restored to Life

36 Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. **37** In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. **38** Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “Please come to us without delay.” **39** So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics[e] and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. **40** But Peter put them all outside, 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. **41** And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. **42** And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. **43** And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

9:36 *Joppa*. About 38 miles from Jerusalem, the main seaport of Judea. Today it is known as Jaffa and is a suburb of Tel Aviv. – Thirty-five miles away from Jerusalem, Joppa was a port town already in the days of Joshua (Joshua 19:46). Saul’s persecution in Jerusalem probably brought the first Christian here. Philip had undoubtedly worked here for a while on his way to Caesarea. (CSB)

disciple. Gk *mathetria*, female disciple. Only time used in Scripture. (TLSB)

was full of good works – Tabitha’s example shows that as believers grow in faith in Christ, they bear the fruit of faith, imitating Christ. Cf. Matthew 25:31-40; Acts 2:44-45; 1 Timothy 5:3-16. (TLSB)

9:37 *had washed her*. In preparation for burial, a custom common to both Jews (Purification of the Dead) and Greeks. (CSB)

Typical preparation for burial of a person of ordinary means (cf Mt 27:59; Jn 11:44). The wealthy anointed their dead with spices and perfumes (cf Jn 12:7; 19:39). (TLSB)

upper room. If burial was delayed, it was customary to lay the body in an upper room. In Jerusalem the body had to be buried the day the person died, but outside Jerusalem up to three days might be allowed for burial. (CSB)

9:38 *come to us without delay!* Whether for consolation or for a miracle, Peter was urged to hurry in order to arrive before the burial. (CSB)

An invitation to attend the funeral. Burial had to take place soon. Yet, Christ gave His disciples authority to raise the dead (Mt 10:8). (TLSB)

9:39 *Dorcas* – The Dorcas societies or guilds in some congregations today do the kind of work which she did, sewing for those in need of clothing. (PBC)

Testimony to Tabitha’s works of charity. (TLSB)

9:40 *put them all outside*. Cf. 1Ki 17:23; 2Ki 4:33. Peter had been present on all three occasions recorded in Scripture when Jesus raised individuals from the dead (Mt 9:25; Lk 7:11–17; Jn 11:1–44). As when Jesus raised Jairus’s daughter, the crowd in the room was told to leave. Unlike Jesus, however, Peter knelt and prayed. (CSB)

He also knew that Jesus had not raised up all the people who died during his ministry. What was Jesus’ will now? Peter sent everyone out of the room so that he could be alone to pray. (PBC)

9:41 *saints and widows*. Distinction may suggest that some widows were not yet believers. (TLSB)

9:42 *many believed*. Cf. Jn 12:11. (CSB)

Cf Mt 4:24; Mk 1:28; Lk 4:14 on how Christ’s fame spread. (TLSB)

9:43 *a tanner*. Occupations were frequently used with personal names to identify individuals further (see 16:14; 18:3; 19:24; 2Ti 4:14), but in this case it is especially significant. A tanner was involved in treating the skins of dead animals, thus contacting the unclean according to Jewish

law; so he was despised by many. Peter's decision to stay with him shows already a willingness to reject Jewish prejudice and prepares the way for his coming vision and the mission to the Gentiles. (CSB)

Ceremonially unclean due to contact with dead animals. That Peter chose to stay with a tanner showed how his views of cleanliness were changing. God will take Peter a step further by Peter's visit to Cornelius's home (10:24-43). (TLSB)

9:36-43 An untimely death comes to Tabitha, a beloved servant. However, those who mourn Tabitha's death witness the power of Christ through her restoration to life. How great is the Lord's kindness! • Father, when my last hour comes, take me to be with You in heaven, through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen. (TLSB)