

Called To Proclaim Christ

Acts 9:10-20

SS Lesson for 08/20/2017

Devotional Scripture: 1 Tim 4:6-16

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: Acts 9:15

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

PREPARATION FOR THE CALL (ACTS 9:10-12)

Prepared by realizing that God works through people (10)

God prepares people so they can be witnesses (Acts 10:1-6, 19-20)

God prepares people so they can intercede (1 Sam 25:14-17, 32-34)

God prepares people so they can provide the conduit of healing (Acts 9:3-11)

God prepares through other's prayers for the receptiveness of God's word (Col 4:2-5)

Prepared by being available for God's use (10)

Available by first giving ourselves to God (2 Cor 8:5)

Available by submitting to God (2 Chron 30:8)

Available by offering ourselves to God as an instrument of righteousness (Rom 6:13)

Available by living for the Lord because we belong to Him (Rom 14:8)

Available by honoring God with our body (1 Cor 6:19-20)

Prepared by following God's instructions (11-12)

Following God's instructions through diligently studying His Word that testifies about His Son Jesus (John 5:39)

Following God's instructions through letting the Bible prove who Jesus is - the Savior of the world (Acts 17:2-3)

Following God's instructions through examining the Bible every day to know the truth about God (Acts 17:11)

Following God's instructions through knowing the Scriptures were written to provide knowledge and encouragement (Rom 15:4)

Following God's instructions through knowing the Scriptures are able to make us wise (2 Tim 3:15)

OBJECTIONS TO THE CALL (ACTS 9:13-15)

Don't fear man (13-14)

Fear God, not man, because God can destroy the body and soul (Matt 10:28)

Don't fear, be ready to die if necessary and pray for God's will to be done (Acts 21:13-14)

Don't fear or worry but keep the faith (2 Tim 4:6-8)

Don't fear, just be faithful and the reward is the crown of life (Rev 2:10)

Don't fear, trust God (John 14:1)

Relent to the call (15)

Relent to please God (1 Sam 15:22)

To relent and be submissive comes for God (James 3:17)

Relent to those in authority over us (1 Peter 5:5)

OBEDIENCE TO THE CALL (ACTS 9:16-20)

Obedience despite delays in knowing details (16)

God sometimes delays His answers because His timing is not man's timing (Isa 55:8-9)

God sometimes delays His answers to display His faithfulness (Heb 10:23)

God sometimes delays His answers because He is patient (Ps 86:15)

Obedience is always the right response to God's instructions (17)

Obedience because our response should be out of love for God because if we love God, we will obey Him (John 14:15)

Obedience because our response is an obligation to live by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:12-14)

Obedience because our response should be to be obedient and serve God regardless of the circumstances (Dan 3:16-18)

Obedience because our response should be to offer our whole selves as living sacrifices to God (Rom 12:1)

Obedience because our response should be to throw off everything that hinders and serve God (Heb 12:1-2)

Obedience because our response should be to be thankful and worship God (Heb 12:28)

Deliverance for the call (18)

Deliverance through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13-14)

Deliverance through grace (2 Tim 1:8-9)
As God delivered those in the Old Testament, He will deliver us (2 Peter 2:9)
God delivers even into our old age (Isaiah 46:4)
God has always delivered and will continue to do so (2 Cor. 1:10)

Empowerment through strength (19)

Strength through Jesus (Phil 4:13)
Strength through enlightenment and power (Eph 1:18-19)
Strength through God's power during human weaknesses (2 Cor 12:10)
Strength for endurance and patience (Col 1:11)

Empowerment through provision of message (20)

Provision of the message from the Holy Spirit (Luke 12:12)
Provision of the message that no one can contradict (Luke 21:15)
Provision of the message through being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8)
Provision of the message expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words (1 Cor 2:13)
Provision of the message through the Spirit's wisdom and revelation (Eph 1:17)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

Conclusion

Characteristics of Conversion

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY

Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines the details of the mission of Ananias as he participated in the **Calling to Proclaim the Christ**. The **study's aim** is to show that sometimes God's call is to a general work, and sometimes it is specific and detailed. The **study's application** is to warn that we must not define a call so narrowly that it limits our awareness of and response to a call.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Acts 9:15

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."

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

9:1a. The adverb **still** looks back to 8:3. While the gospel was reaching farther outside of Jerusalem, **Saul** was continuing his relentless persecution of the church.

9:1b-2. So great was Saul's hatred for the church that **he went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus**. Damascus (see its location on the map) was not under the control of Judea, Galilee, or the Decapolis. What jurisdiction would the high priest have over synagogues in Damascus? This is usually answered by saying Rome recognized the right of extradition when the high priest in **Jerusalem** demanded it. But this can also be explained in another way. At that time Damascus may have been under the Nabatean king, Aretas IV (cf. 2 Cor. 11:32-33). In order to gain favor with the anti-Roman Jews, Aretas, who hated the Romans, would have conceded this favor to the high priest. The mention of "synagogues in Damascus" indicates that Christianity was still closely associated with Judaism (in James 2:2 the word "meeting" renders the Gr. *synagōgēn*, "synagogue"). Mention of Damascus shows that Christianity had spread rapidly. Strangely, Saul referred to Christianity as **the Way**, a term used only in Acts (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

9:3-4. **Saul** both **heard** the **voice** of the Lord Jesus and saw Him (cf. 9:17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). Though there is no explicit statement of Saul's seeing Christ, it is implicit in the reference to **a light from heaven**. It was fundamental to Saul's apostleship that he saw the resurrected Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1). The question, **Why do you persecute Me?** (cf. Acts 9:5) is filled with significance for it shows the union of Christ with His church. The Lord did not ask, "Why do you persecute My church?" The reference to "Me" gave Saul his first glimpse into the great doctrine of Christians being in Christ. This same truth was implied earlier by Luke when he wrote that the Lord continues His work on earth in the church (1:1). Also Ananias' lie to Peter was a lie to the Holy Spirit (5:3). Luke, with Paul, saw Christ and the church as the Head and its body.

9:5. Some interpret "Lord" in Saul's question, **Who are You, Lord?** (*kyrie*) as "Sir." It is possible for this noun to have this meaning, as it does in Matthew 13:27; 27:63; John 4:11; Acts 10:4; and elsewhere. However, there is too much that is supernatural in this passage to use the mere human vocative, "Sir." Even though **Saul** did not immediately recognize this One as Jesus, he must have acknowledged a supernatural being. Jesus then identified Himself to Saul: **I am Jesus** (cf. 9:17). The words, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (KJV), are not in the better and earlier Greek manuscripts. But this statement is found in Acts 26:14.

9:6. The resurrected Lord commanded Saul, **Go into the city and you will be told what you must do**. This does not mean that Ananias (v. 10) taught Saul the doctrine of justification, as some claim. Instead, Saul was told he must proclaim the gospel, which would involve suffering (vv. 15-16; 22:10, 15; 26:16-20). The Lord Himself gave Saul the truth of justification by faith on the Damascus Road; Acts 26:18 is clear on that point (cf. Gal. 1:11-12).

9:7. An apparent discrepancy stands between verse 7 and 22:9. In 9:7 Luke recorded that **the men** who traveled **with Saul... heard the sound** (*phōnēs*), but in 22:9 Luke wrote that "they did not understand the voice" (*phōnēn*). Literally, that clause in 22:9 may be translated, "They did not hear the sound." The NIV correctly translates the verse, because the verb "to hear" with the genitive case may mean "to hear a sound" and with the accusative case "to hear with understanding." The genitive case is employed in 9:7, and the

accusative is used in 22:9. So the travelers with Saul heard the sound (9:7) but did not understand what Christ said (22:9).

9:8. If Saul's "thorn in the flesh" was eye trouble (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7), this may have been the prelude of it. At any rate there is a sharp contrast between **Saul** in Acts 9:1 and 8. One moment he was storming up the road, determined to capture and imprison Christians. Soon thereafter he was **led like a child by the hand into Damascus**. God's grace is often displayed in great powerful acts and in apparent catastrophes.

9:9. The **three days** of blindness, fasting, and praying (v. 11) were a time of waiting. Saul still had not received the message God had promised him (v. 6).

9:10-14. By means of a **vision** God instructed a reluctant **Ananias** to **restore** Saul's **sight**. He was to go to **Saul** where he was staying with a man named **Judas** whose **house** was **on Straight Street**. It was one of the two parallel streets that ran from the western to the eastern wall. The first reference to Saul's birthplace—**Tarsus**—is given in verse 11 (see the map; cf. v. 30). Interestingly believers were first called **saints** in the Book of Acts here (v. 13). The church is comprised of "set-apart ones" (*hagiois*; cf. "saints" in Rom. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). From Acts 9:14 it is evident that the news of Saul's coming to persecute believers in Damascus had preceded his arrival, and **Ananias** feared what Saul might do.

9:15. The Lord assured **Ananias... This man is My chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel**. Saul was to become Paul, the apostle to the uncircumcised (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:2, 7-8; Eph. 3:8), including kings (cf. Governor Felix [Acts 24:1-23], Governor Porcius Festus [24:27-25:12], King Herod Agrippa II [25:13-26:32], and possibly Emperor Nero [25:11]). The apostle, of course, also ministered to "the people of Israel" (cf. 9:20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8; 26:17-20; Rom. 1:16). How amazing that the one who persecuted Christians so violently should himself be transformed into a witness of the gospel—and such a dynamic, forceful witness at that!

9:16. The partial fulfillment of this prediction is seen in Saul's inventory of his suffering (2 Cor. 11:23-27). Three times in as many verses the conversation between Ananias and the Lord included the word **name** (Acts 9:14-16; cf. 3:16).

9:17. Brother Saul—what words of encouragement these must have been to **Saul!** The first recorded man to call Saul a Christian brother was **Ananias**. A more complete statement of Ananias' words is given in 22:14-16. Ananias' apprehension of Saul was turned to love for Saul because of the Lord's directive. Ananias identified with Saul by **placing his hands on him**. Saul's being **filled with the Holy Spirit** clearly followed his conversion (cf. 4:8, 31; Eph. 5:18).

9:18. In his healing from his blindness **something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again**. The word "scales" (*lepidēs*, from the verb *lepō*, "to peel") was used of the scales of fish and crocodiles. As in several previous conversions recorded in Acts, water baptism followed conversion (8:12, 38). After this event Ananias disappeared from the narrative and is not mentioned again except in chapter 22 where Paul recounted his own conversion.

9:19a. The three days without food or drink, in addition to the shock of his "exposure" to the resurrected Christ, left Saul weak. However, several things helped him regain **his strength**: his encounter with Ananias, his healing, his filling with the Spirit, his water baptism, and his **taking some food**.

9:19b-20. After only a few **days with the Christians in Damascus** Saul **began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God**. Preaching to Jews in their synagogues was also his strategy on his missionary journeys (the first journey—13:5, 14; 14:1; the second journey—17:2, 10, 17; 18:4; the third journey—18:19; 19:8). Acts 9:20 includes the only occurrence of the phrase "Son of God" in Acts. On the Damascus Road the first thing Saul learned was who Jesus is.

9:21. The Jews **were astonished**. This response is understandable. The Greek verb *existanto* is literally, "they were beside themselves; they were struck out of their senses"; several other people had the same response to Jesus (Mark 2:12; 5:42; 6:51). This word is used in Acts five times (2:7; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16). Saul's intense persecution campaign had **raised havoc in Jerusalem** (cf. 8:3; 22:19; 26:11).

9:22. **Saul** used his theological training to good advantage in pressing home the truth that the Lord **Jesus is the Messiah**. He had gone to **Damascus** to persecute the church; he ended up preaching Jesus. What a contrast! What grace! No wonder the Damascus **Jews** were **baffled** (*synechynnen*, "bewildered, confused," from *syncheō*, used in the NT only in 2:6; 9:22; 21:27, 31).

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

The text contains the words of the Lord in relation to Saul, or the Apostle Paul, as he would become known. They were spoken to Ananias, a follower of Jesus who lived in Damascus. He was unaware that while traveling to Damascus to thwart the efforts of the growing Christian church there, Saul had dramatically encountered the living Lord and been converted to Christ (Acts 9:1-9). The Lord spoke to Ananias, telling him to seek out Saul and pray for him that he might receive the sight he had lost when he met the Lord on the road. Understandably, Ananias was hesitant, for he was very familiar with the suffering Saul had inflicted on the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 9:10-14). The Lord's words assured Ananias that Saul now was a follower of Jesus and had been specially chosen by the Lord for an important task. That task was to bear the Lord's name "before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." In recounting his conversion later, Paul indicated that the Lord had given this message directly to him (Acts 26:16-17) and that Ananias had told him this as well (22:14-15). Thus, Ananias's words would have confirmed the Lord's call. While Paul, like Peter and the other apostles, would proclaim the gospel to their fellow Jews, Paul's ministry also would be to Gentiles and kings. Perhaps Paul's Roman citizenship and extensive learning especially prepared him for this wide ministry. In fact, in his three missionary journeys, he found the Gentiles for the most part more receptive to the gospel than his fellow Jews. While his ministry was always "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek [Gentile]" (Rom. 1:16), Paul became known as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 11:13; 1 Tim. 2:7). The revelation at his conversion that this would be the case must have been startling to Paul, as it would have been to any Jew. The relationship of Jews to Gentiles was an ongoing issue in the early church, and even Peter at one time succumbed to the notion that Jewish believers must separate even from believing Gentiles (cf. Gal. 2:11-14). Paul never wavered in his position. He understood that the gospel of grace is for all who believe, not just Jews, and he opposed even Peter when he wavered on the matter. Paul's commitment to the Gentile mission was unrelenting and uncompromising. No doubt much of this can be traced to the assurance he had from his conversion and from the affirmation of Ananias that this was what the Lord had chosen him to do. Paul would proclaim Christ to Gentiles in many places, but he would also speak for the Lord before Gentile rulers, most notably Agrippa and Caesar (Acts 25—26; 27:23-24). Those opportunities would come, however, only because of his suffering (9:16) and imprisonment. Paul was a chosen vessel for God. He had unique gifts and experiences that made him an effective missionary for Christ. But our text reminds us that Paul, like us, was merely a vessel. A vessel by itself is of little use. Only when it is filled does it serve its purpose. Like the great apostle, we must submit to the Lord and allow Him to fill us with the power, wisdom, and ability to serve Him.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Saul, a Jew from Tarsus, had been trained as a rabbi by the best teachers in Jerusalem (compare Acts 22:3). His education in the law would have been the ancient equivalent of a doctoral degree today. When the Jewish leadership began to persecute Christians, Saul was their point man. We first see this in his leadership role in this regard in the stoning of Stephen (7:58). Saul went on to terrorize the church by conducting house-to-house searches for Christians (Acts 8:3; 22:4). His persecuting zeal reached a fever pitch when he took the initiative to ask the high priest for authority to extend the persecution to Damascus, about 150 miles to the north of Jerusalem. His plan was to find Christians in the Jewish population there and bring them back to Jerusalem by force (9:1, 2). His encounter with the risen Christ is the immediate backdrop for today's lesson (9:3-9). Saul's ambitions and zeal had not gone unnoticed by the Lord of the church!

The site of today's lesson is the city of Damascus. In the Old Testament, this city is identified with the kingdom of Syria (or Aram), the sometime ally but often foe of ancient Israel (see 1 Kings 15:18). Some claim that Damascus is the oldest continually inhabited site in the world. Indeed, the Bible notes its existence in the time of Abraham (see Genesis 15:2), and archaeological data extends back even further. Damascus was important in the first century AD as a trading hub for caravan routes. It was a multiethnic city with a substantial Jewish population. These facts highlight the perceived need to extend persecution against Jewish Christians there. Threats to the "purity" of synagogues in Damascus could not be tolerated. Saul's mission to this city changed, however, before he arrived there. As today's lesson opens, Saul is in his third day of blindness as a result of his encounter with Christ.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Preparation for the Call (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."

Prepared by realizing that God works through people (10)

God prepares people so they can be witnesses (Acts 10:1-6, 19-20)

10:1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" 4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." 19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

God prepares people so they can intercede (1 Sam 25:14-17, 32-34)

14 One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. 15 Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. 16 Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. 17 Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him." 32 David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. 33 May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. 34 Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak."

God prepares people so they can provide the conduit of healing (Acts 9:3-11)

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

God prepares through other's prayers for the receptiveness of God's word (Col 4:2-5)

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

Prepared by being available for God's use (10)

Available by first giving ourselves to God (2 Cor 8:5)

And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Available by submitting to God (2 Chron 30:8)

Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; submit to the LORD. Come to the sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you.

Available by offering ourselves to God as an instrument of righteousness (Rom 6:13)

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Available by living for the Lord because we belong to Him (Rom 14:8)

If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Available by honoring God with our body (1 Cor 6:19-20)

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

Prepared by following God's instructions (11-12)

Following God's instructions through diligently studying His Word that testifies about His Son Jesus (John 5:39)

39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,

Following God's instructions through letting the Bible prove who Jesus is - the Savior of the world (Acts 17:2-3)

2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ," he said.

Following God's instructions through examining the Bible every day to know the truth about God (Acts 17:11)

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Following God's instructions through knowing the Scriptures were written to provide knowledge and encouragement (Rom 15:4)

4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Following God's instructions through knowing the Scriptures are able to make us wise (2 Tim 3:15)

15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Objections to the Call (Acts 9:13-15)

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.

Don't fear man (13-14)

Fear God, not man, because God can destroy the body and soul (Matt 10:28)

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Don't fear, be ready to die if necessary and pray for God's will to be done (Acts 21:13-14)

13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

Don't fear or worry but keep the faith (2 Tim 4:6-8)

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Don't fear, just be faithful and the reward is the crown of life (Rev 2:10)

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Don't fear, trust God (John 14:1)

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

Relent to the call (15)

Relent to please God (1 Sam 15:22)

22 But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

To relent and be submissive comes for God (James 3:17)

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Relent to those in authority over us (1 Peter 5:5)

5 Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Obedience to the Call (Acts 9:16-20)

16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

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.

Obedience despite delays in knowing details (16)

God sometimes delays His answers because His timing is not man's timing (Isa 55:8-9)

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God sometimes delays His answers to display His faithfulness (Heb 10:23)

23 Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

God sometimes delays His answers because He is patient (Ps 86:15)

15 But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Obedience is always the right response to God's instructions (17)

Obedience because our response should be out of love for God because if we love God, we will obey Him (John 14:15)

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

Obedience because our response is an obligation to live by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:12-14)

12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Obedience because our response should be to be obedient and serve God regardless of the circumstances (Dan 3:16-18)

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Obedience because our response should be to offer our whole selves as living sacrifices to God (Rom 12:1)

12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.

Obedience because our response should be to throw off everything that hinders and serve God (Heb 12:1-2)

12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Obedience because our response should be to be thankful and worship God (Heb 12:28)

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

Deliverance for the call (18)

Deliverance through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13-14)

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Deliverance through grace (2 Tim 1:8-9)

8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time

As God delivered those in the Old Testament, He will deliver us (2 Peter 2:9)

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

God delivers even into our old age (Isaiah 46:4)

4 Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

God has always delivered and will continue to do so (2 Cor. 1:10)

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

Empowerment through strength (19)

Strength through Jesus (Phil 4:13)

13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Strength through enlightenment and power (Eph 1:18-19)

18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,

Strength through God's power during human weaknesses (2 Cor 12:10)

10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Strength for endurance and patience (Col 1:11)

11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully

Empowerment through provision of message (20)

Provision of the message from the Holy Spirit (Luke 12:12)

12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."

Provision of the message that no one can contradict (Luke 21:15)

15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

Provision of the message through being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8)

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!

Provision of the message expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words (1 Cor 2:13)

13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Provision of the message through the Spirit's wisdom and revelation (Eph 1:17)

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Conclusion

The first question which must be asked with regard to the interpretation of this text is this: "What is the meaning of this text in the context of the whole book?" Luke has included this account of Saul's conversion in order to contribute to the argument which he is seeking to develop. The argument of the Book of Acts is essentially this: The expansion of the gospel through the church as it is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The expansion is three-fold:

- (1) The expansion from Christ, to His apostles, to His church
- (2) The geographical expansion from Jerusalem to Rome
- (3) The racial expansion from the Jews to the Gentiles.

Saul's conversion was to play a crucial role in the expansion of the gospel. Paul's opposition resulted in the scattering of the Christians from Jerusalem, thus taking the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and beyond (Acts 8:1; 11:19-21). The salvation of Saul was to result in the gospel being preached to distant people and lands, and in the extension of the church to many key cities. In the process, Saul was to greatly extend the outreach of the gospel to the Gentiles. It was his preaching that resulted in the conversion of many Gentiles, and it was his writing (his epistles) to these saints which greatly strengthened them in their faith. Saul's conversion is a watershed event, catapulting the gospel to the Gentiles and to more distant places.

The conversion of Saul is important in another way. It is one of the few accounts of a conversion which is described with some detail (although this detail is much less than we would prefer). The question must be asked as to whether or not Saul's conversion has a more general application and relevance. In other words, "Is Saul's conversion typical and illustrative of the conversion of every saint, or is it unique, the exceptional case, which has little correspondence to most converts?"

The longer I study Saul's conversion, the more convinced I am that his conversion is typical. Granted, his experience is unique and dramatic. Few Christians will encounter the risen, glorified Lord as Saul did here. We would readily grant that every conversion which is recorded is unique, to some degree. That is because our Lord always confronts, convicts, and converts men and women individually, in the light of their own actions and beliefs. Jesus dealt with Nicodemus (John 3) very differently from the Samaritan woman (John 4). Nevertheless, conversion has certain elements which are vital and which are to be present in any salvation experience. The common characteristics of conversion are those on which I would like to focus in the conversion of Saul.

Characteristics of Conversion

(1) Saul's salvation was the salvation of a sinner. One of the most dramatic revelations of Saul's Damascus road experience was that he was not serving God, but he was persecuting Him. The first words spoken to Saul were, "Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). What a shock these words must have been to Saul, who up to this point, seems to have prided himself for his faithfulness to Judaism! Up till now, Jesus was the sinner, and Saul was the saint. Now that the Lord had identified Himself as Jesus, Saul recognized that he was the sinner. In fact, as Saul would later write, he realized that he was "**chief of sinners**" (1 Timothy 1:15). Saul was also blinded, which identified him with the blindness of the nation Israel of which the Old Testament prophets wrote (see above). In Saul's account of his conversion to His Jewish brethren, he added that when Ananias arrived, he instructed him to "**Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His**

name” (Acts 22:16). This expression, “calling on the name of the Lord” seems to be one used consistently in the Old Testament. It is the invitation for sinful Israelites to be saved, by repenting and calling on the name of the Lord for salvation (Isaiah 55:6-7; cf. also Psalm 50:15; Joel 2:32; Jeremiah 29:12; 33:3-8).

(2) Saul’s salvation was exclusively the work of a sovereign God. Our text presents Saul as a man who was not only running from God, but one who was actively opposing Him. Saul was not “seeking God.” Saul was saved in spite of himself. This Paul knew and testified to. God chose Saul and had his destiny planned, before He saved him. When God spoke to Ananias commanding him to go to the house where Saul was staying, he was to receive him as a brother; and he was told that he was called to suffer as God’s chosen vessel to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, kings, and to his fellow-Israelites. In Galatians 1, Saul wrote that God had called him “while he was still in his mother’s womb” (Galatians 1:15).

(3) Saul’s salvation was personal. The election of Saul to salvation was specific and thus, personal. It is evident in the way he was saved. The risen Lord selected Saul out of the group with which he was traveling to hear, to see Him, and to understand His words. Jesus did not address the entire group but said, “**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?**” The others knew that something unusual was going on, but they did not grasp it (Acts 22:9). The approach the Lord took was one of dealing with Saul in the light of his sin, of his salvation, and of his ministry. The voice from heaven did not call out, “Have you ever heard of the four spiritual laws?”¹⁵² Ananias was sent to Saul only. The message which Saul received was not only a call to salvation, but a divine call to ministry. There are two very important implications to the personal dimension of Saul’s conversion. The first is this: every saved person must have a personal conversion experience. We may not be able to identify the precise moment or the exact events which brought it about, but salvation does not happen in some kind of group way. Salvation may occur in a large group, such as those saved at the preaching of Peter at Pentecost, but each individual was saved because of a personal encounter with Christ. Have you had such an encounter? Second, the gospel should be proclaimed in a way that is personal. When I look through the Gospels and the Book of Acts, I never find the gospel presented in the same way to different people. The message of the gospel, to be sure, is always the same, but the approach is not. Let us not fail to respect the individuality of the conversion experience and to deal with people in the light of their individuality. Let us avoid “cookie cutter conversions.”

(4) Saul’s salvation was miraculous. Saul’s conversion was a miracle, short and simple, but not so much the result of the external miracle of the bright light and the voice of the Lord as the internal transformation and illumination which God wrought (Galatians 1:15-16). When Paul spoke of his conversion here in Galatians 1, he did not speak of the light which shone without, but rather of the light which shone within. He did not say that God revealed his Son to him, but that He revealed His Son **in him**. This divine illumination is that miracle which God performs within a lost, blinded, dead soul, so as to bring about salvation (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6). Salvation is the miracle whereby God removes the blindness of sin and of Satan, whereby God replaces death with life. This is a miracle, a miracle which is all of God, and all of grace.

(5) Saul’s salvation was an act of divine grace. Saul recognized that he was a sinner, and that his “**righteousness**” was but “**dung**” before God. He realized that it was nothing which he had done—nor ever would do—but only by what Jesus Christ had done that saved him. Thus, whenever he spoke of his conversion and his call to ministry, he always spoke of this incident as an act of divine grace, of God’s unmerited favor, of an act of mercy toward him (Romans 15:15-16).

(6) Saul’s salvation was a conversion, a radical change. Salvation is a revolution, not an evolution. It is not a transition, but a transformation. It is a miraculous, dramatic reversal, first of one’s beliefs, and then of one’s behavior. This is very evident in the conversion of Saul. One moment, Saul was persecuting the church; shortly thereafter he was seeking to fellowship with the saints. One moment, Saul was opposing Jesus, as though He were the sinner; the next, Saul is on his face before this Jesus, calling Him Lord. One moment, Saul is inflicting pain and suffering on others who trust in Jesus as the Messiah, the next, he is enduring suffering for the sake of Jesus, the Messiah. Nothing is more evident in the account of Saul’s conversion than his radical reversal. Here is a graphic illustration of what true repentance is—it is a turning about, beginning with one’s belief and bearing fruit in one’s conduct. The baptism of Saul was his testimony to the change which had taken place. But beyond this, his conversion totally changed the remainder of his life. The life-changing implications of conversion are expressed in these words of Paul to Titus (Titus 2:11-15). Perhaps nowhere else is the radical change (of conversion) in Paul’s life more readily evident than in his attitude toward the saints. Saul sought them out to persecute, even kill them, as an unbeliever; but he sought them out to worship and fellowship with them as a Christian. More than that, he had a deep dislike and hostility toward Christians before his conversion. When we look at Paul’s great love and compassion for the saints, we have to remind ourselves of the hate he once had toward them. Only a radical conversion can produce this attitude in the life of a man like Saul.

(7) The salvation of Saul was Christ-centered. When all is said and done, the miracle which took place on the way to Damascus (and likely in Damascus as well) was that Saul saw Jesus as the Son of God, as the Messiah, and as his Savior and Lord.

(8) The salvation of Saul made him a vital part of Christ's body, the church. The first words of the Lord Jesus to Saul were intended to teach him the inseparable unity between Christ and His church. Saul could only be persecuting Jesus through the members of His body, the church. Thus, persecuting the church was persecuting Jesus Christ. If the unity of Christ and His body, the church, were a vital truth with respect to Saul's persecution of the church, it was also a vital truth for him as a Christian. It is no wonder that a fair amount of the text is devoted to a description of Saul's attempt to associate with the local church, first at Damascus, and then in Jerusalem. And if this was important for Saul to do, it was equally important for the church to accept him into their fellowship, as an expression of their unity in Christ. The laying on of Ananias' hands was also an expression of unity, as was the later **"right hand of fellowship"** extended by some of the apostles to Saul (Galatians 2:9).

(9) Finally, I believe that Luke's portrayal of Saul's salvation is typical of that of the nation Israel, which is still future. I believe that as Luke portrays Saul in Acts, it is as a prototype, a picture of Israel. The Old Testament passages which I have suggested bear to Saul (**"blind," "light"**) are passages which speak of Israel in their original context. Saul, in my opinion, is portrayed by Luke as the first-fruits of these promises. Saul, like Israel, had been blinded as to the meaning of the law because of his rejection of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:14; cf. 5:3-4). Saul, the typical (albeit more zealous) Jew, opposed God in the person of Christ and His body, the church, even while he thought he was serving Him. And yet, even in opposing God, he furthered God's purposes; he was instrumental in the evangelization of the Gentiles (Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19-21). And yet while God had foretold the rebellion of Israel and their rejection, so He had also foretold of Israel's restoration (cf. the **"light"** and **"blind"** passages above). And thus, in God's time, Saul was dramatically converted, seeing the Christ whom he had been persecuting, risen from the dead and in His heavenly glory. Israel too will look on Him whom they have pierced and mourn. Israel too will just as surely return to God; and when it happens, it will be all of God, all to His glory and praise.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/14-conversion-saul-acts-91-31>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The dramatic events of Acts 9 record how extreme God's action had to be for Saul to turn his attention to God's call. Saul was so obsessed with climbing the ladder of favor within the Jewish leadership (Galatians 1:14) that he did not recognize the legitimacy of the Christian message. He was spiritually blind to the fact that he was persecuting Jesus Christ, the risen Son of God. Saul, as Paul, went on to become the great apostle to the Gentiles. Christians of non-Jewish background owe him a great debt of gratitude, for he fought a somewhat lonely battle to gain an equal place in the church for people of all backgrounds. Even so, let us not forget the key role of the nearly anonymous Ananias, who was called by God to overcome his fears and minister to the church's greatest enemy at just the right time. The voice of Ananias was part of the call of God for the one who came to be known as the apostle Paul. Nearly 30 years later, Paul mentioned this man by name (Acts 22:12). He never forgot this man of faith, a faith that overcame fear. Acts 9 is not intended as a pattern for how God brings people to faith, and the role of Paul as apostle was unique. Even so, God expects us at times to be his hands and feet, as was Ananias. May we overcome our fears as we answer that call.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. As Christians, we must receive new converts, no matter what they may have come out of (Acts 9:10-12)
2. The power of God can transform the toughest sinner (vs. 13)
3. Earthly kingdoms are all subject to God's sovereign authority (vs. 14)
4. We have a responsibility to encourage new Christians (vs. 15)
5. Spreading God's Word may include suffering (vs. 16)
6. The Holy Spirit enables us to live right and spread God's Word (vss. 17-20)