

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

ACTS 9



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

What's in a Name?: Acts 9
Copyright 2022 T. M. and Susie Moore
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

Except as indicated, all Scripture are taken from the *New King James Version*. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All quotations from the early Church Fathers are from *Acts: Ancient Christian Commentary Series, New Testament V*, Francis Martin, ed., General Editor Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2006). All quotations from the Reformation Church Fathers are from *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Acts, New Testament VI*, Esther Chung-Kim and Todd R. Hains, eds., Timothy George, General Editor (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014). All quotes from John Calvin are from *Commentaries on Acts*, Rev. John Pringle, tr. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translational Society). All quotations from Matthew Henry are from *Matthew Henry Concise Commentary*, E-text version Copyright 1996, 2002 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. All Rights Reserved. All quotes from Earl Radmacher are from *The NKJV Study Bible*, copyright ©1997, 2007 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All psalms for singing are from *The Ailbe Psalter* (Williston: Waxed Tablet Publications, 2006), available by [clicking here](#).

Introduction to Acts 9

Luke is a historian. He's telling a story, the story of the ongoing work of Christ. He's not wasting any words. No report, incident, or account is included except what contributes to his story.

So when, in one chapter, we read about Saul, Ananias, Damascus, Tarsus, Aeneas, Tabitha, Joppa, and the church, well, suffice it to say, Luke has crammed a lot into Acts 9.

This is by far one of the most interesting and artistic chapters of the book of Acts. Read slowly and meditate deeply. You won't want to miss anything.

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

Please visit our website, www.ailbe.org, to discover the many other resources available to serve your needs.

If you find these studies, or any of our other resources helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 Saul of Tarsus

Pray Psalm 17.6, 7.

I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God;
Incline Your ear to me, *and* hear my speech.
Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand,
O You who save those who trust *in You*
From those who rise up *against them*.

Sing Psalm 17.6, 7.

(Park Street: [*All You that Fear Jehovah's Name*](#))

When I have called, You answered me, Lord; hear now my fervent, seeking word!
Let kindness flow by Your command. Keep and preserve me by Your right hand,
keep and preserve me by Your right hand.

Read Acts 9.1-9.

Preparation

1. Why was Saul going to Damascus?
2. What happened to him along the way?

Meditation

Acts 9 stands out because of the many names used to carry the narrative. It's a kind of hinge, opening the door to the next phase in the ongoing work of the Lord. Luke begins with the story of Saul, who was a formidable challenge for the followers of Jesus.

Saul's story is familiar and wonderful. Jesus has borne with this raging, murderous zealot long enough. It was not Christians Saul was persecuting, but Christ (v. 5), Who identifies so closely with His Body that He sees us as one with Him! He lured Saul out of the safe confines of Jerusalem to blast him to life on a dusty desert road. Paul would later say that his conversion was a kind of pattern for all conversions (1 Tim. 1.16).

“Get up and move along; I'll tell you the rest later.” Saul is helpless under the irresistible and converting grace of God. All his bluster, all his zeal, all his power to resist Jesus, blown away in a flash and Word of instruction. God is sovereign in the Gospel. When He shines His love on someone, all that person can do is obey.

Saul the Pharisee was captive to unbelief, sin, and blind religious zeal – just like his namesake, Saul the son of Kish. But whereas King Saul died in sins, persecutor Saul was delivered from them. Jesus took him captive to truth, grace, and life, and gifted him for the ongoing work of the Kingdom (Eph. 4.8).

As a historian, Luke is constrained by space tell us about the ongoing work of Christ. He will select his stories to press a point, connect some dots, or set a trajectory to guide others in taking up the work of the Lord. Here we are reminded that, though powers of various kinds be arrayed against us, they cannot overcome or prevail against the power of the Lord.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Luke wants us to get a taste for the person Saul of Tarsus was. He didn't leave it to our imaginations to wonder about a person who would stand there while Stephen's murderers “laid down their clothes at the feet

of a young man named Saul” (Acts 7.58). We have already been told that “he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (Acts 8.3). But here he adds the ominous words that Saul was “still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” so that if he “found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9.1, 2).

Saul was a Christian’s worst nightmare. He was not your run of the mill antagonist. No. He ate, drank, slept, and dreamt about imprisoning and murdering the Body of Christ. He breathed hatred toward the Way, as if he had been wronged and was now determined to extinguish this Light. Or maybe he was strictly zealous to protect Judaism. Either way, he was a scourge to the people of faith.

I wonder, did he forget Exodus 20.13? In all his eagerness to stamp out Jesus did he omit from his thoughts, “You shall not murder”?

That’s the thing about ungodly zealotry, it never actually remembers God. For “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3.18; Ps. 36.1).

Understanding the horrible person that Saul was makes us see the glory of God’s forgiveness. And His persistence to “save to the uttermost those who come to” Him through Jesus (Heb. 7.25). And then appreciate His persistence and forgiveness. Because at some point in our own lives we surely could have heard Jesus say to us, “...why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9.4)

If God could reach Saul of Tarsus, and us, He can reach and save anyone!

The Light has knocked us off our horses, as it did Saul, and we are instructed to “Arise and go”. And because we can read His Word, we know what we must do (Acts 9.6), and the Good News that we must share.

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom [we are] chief” (1 Tim. 1.15).

Knowing that: “Eye has not seen (Acts 9.7), nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2.9).

These beautiful words were penned by the man previously known as Saul of Tarsus.

For reflection

1. In what ways is Saul’s conversion a model or pattern of your own?
2. How should the conversion of Saul encourage you about the lost people in your Personal Mission Field?
3. What does the conversion of Saul tell us about the sovereignty of Jesus Christ in carrying out His ongoing work?

*Saul submitted without reserve, desirous to know what the Lord Jesus would have him to do. Christ’s discoveries of himself to poor souls are humbling; they lay them very low, in mean thoughts of themselves. For three days Saul took no food, and it pleased God to leave him for that time without relief. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 9.1-9**

Pray Psalm 17.13-15.

Pray for those around the world who persecute our brothers and sisters in Christ. Pray that God will shame them (Ps. 83.16), restrain them, and turn many of them from enemies into friends. Pray for persecuted believers – and for yourself – to see Jesus and the glory in His face (2 Cor. 4.6), and to be bold as His witnesses.

What's in a Name?: Acts 9

Sing Psalm 17.13-15.

(Park Street: [*All You that Fear Jehorah's Name*](#))

Rise up, O Lord, and bring them low! Brandish Your sword, and save my soul!
With children they are satisfied; treasures fulfill their hope and pride,
treasures fulfill their hope and pride.

But as for me, Lord, save and bless! Let me behold Your righteousness.
Your face in glory I would see, and thus forever blessed be,
and thus forever blessed be.

2 Ananias and Judas

Pray Psalm 113.1-3.

Praise the LORD!
Praise, O servants of the LORD,
Praise the name of the LORD!
Blessed be the name of the LORD
From this time forth and forevermore!
From the rising of the sun to its going down
The LORD's name *is* to be praised.

Sing Psalm 113.1-3.

(Armageddon: Who is on the Lord's Side?)

Praise the Lord, O praise Him, all who know His Name!
From this day forever, magnify His fame!
From the time each morning when the sun is raised
To its evening waning, let His Name be praised!

Refrain vv. 1, 2

Praise the Lord, O praise Him, all who know His Name!
From this day forever, magnify His fame!

Read Acts 9.1-14; meditate on verses 10-14.

Preparation

1. How did the Lord use Ananias?
2. How did He use Judas?

Meditation

Ananias was merely one of many believers in Damascus, and God could have lodged Saul in the home of anyone besides Judas. He could have chosen *any* of the believers in Damascus for this important work of readying Saul for ministry. But He chose Ananias. And Judas.

Wait a second: Haven't we heard those names before?

Ananias responded with a ready heart when the Lord appeared to him in a vision – not what we would consider a usual way of the Lord's making His will known, but in these early days of the ongoing work of Christ, not uncommon, at least with certain select disciples.

Ananias was ready to do whatever the Lord wanted. Like young Samuel, he may not have known exactly Who was speaking to him (1 Sam. 3), but he would be willing to hear the Lord and do whatever He commanded. Except – wow! Maybe he spoke too soon?

Not many Christians name their children "Judas" or even "Ananias." Those names connote betrayal and self-interest for all who know them from the gospels and Acts 5. Jesus brushes all such nonsense aside by sending Saul to the shelter of a man named Judas (v. 11) – obviously a disciple – and by sending a disciple named Ananias to welcome Saul into the Kingdom. In Jesus, everything can be reconciled and restored.

This chapter reminds us that the ongoing work of the Lord is precisely that – the *Lord's*. He is moving on, in,

and through people to further His Kingdom economy on earth as it is in heaven. Sometimes that requires His people to take up unlikely or even risky tasks. What might that mean for you today?

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Ananias and Judas. Two names that we are perhaps revulsed by, that now we must accept, because God is giving them a new connotation. This Ananias will be a truth teller, not a liar. And this Judas, not a betrayer, but an embracer.

Both these men, regardless of their names, were given onerous tasks. One to host a brutal murderer, and the other to give a saving touch and word to the same.

And we are getting a taste for all the different things that God in His mercy calls His children to do.

They are both going before the church to show them that this once feared and hated man is now a brother. They are showing the church how to do it. And God is leading them every step of the way.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”
(1 Jn. 3.1)

As God said to Isaiah,
“If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul,
then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your noonday.
The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought,
and strengthen your bones; you shall *be* like a watered garden,
and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” (Is. 58.9-11)

What a beautiful word picture of the courageous and loving works of this Ananias and Judas.
We, too, can tell people that the burden and yoke of sin can be taken away.
We can stop pointing the finger of judgment at sinners and instead point them to Jesus.
We can extend the love of Christ to hungry and afflicted souls.
We can be a light in the darkness and water in the drought.
We can bloom and blossom in God's love.
Knowing that love never fails. (1 Cor. 13.8)

Ananias. Judas. Us.

All called to be and touch new creations.

“Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5.17).

For reflection

1. How can we have the courage of Ananias to do whatever the Lord commands?
2. How did the Lord Jesus show His love for Saul? How does He show that love to you?
3. What's the most important lesson you learn from the example of Judas and Ananias?

... the Lord setteth out his grace unto us, that as he stopped Paul before, so now he reacheth him his hand of his own accord, by his minister. And, in the mean season, we are also taught, by his example, to be more ready and careful to seek out the lost sheep.
John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Acts 9.10*

Pray Psalm 113.4-9.

Thank God for the gracious way He lifted you out of sin and darkness and conveyed you into His Kingdom of light and life. Praise the Lord for all your believing friends, and pray for those poor in spirit who will hear the Good News of Jesus today.

Sing Psalm 113.4-9.

(Armageddon: Who is on the Lord's Side?)

High above the nations, on Your glorious throne,
who is like You, Savior, ruling all You own?
Sovereign and all-knowing, over all above,
praise to You is owing for Your perfect love!

Refrain vs. 1, 2

Praise the Lord, O praise Him, all who know His Name!
From this day forever, magnify His fame!

Though You rule from heaven, looking down on earth,
praise and thanks be given to Your holy worth!
Down You reach to touch us, clad in ash and dust,
raising us with such as in Your favor trust.

Refrain

Seated now with princes 'round Your glorious throne,
we by grace are lifted to become Your own.
Barren women, joyous, glad their children bear;
joining in the chorus, they Your praise declare.

Refrain

3 Gentiles and Israel

Pray Psalm 78.1-4.

Give ear, O my people, to my law;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
We will not hide *them* from their children,
Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,
And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.

Sing Psalm 78.1-4.

(Foundation: *How Firm a Foundation*)

Give ear, O my people, attend to my word,
dark sayings and parables sent from the Lord,
things we have before by our fathers been told,
which we would not dare from our children withhold.

Read Acts 9.1-19; meditate on verses 15-19.

Preparation

1. For what was God preparing Saul?
2. Where did that preparation begin?

Meditation

Jesus had chosen Saul to “bear” His Name “before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” He had big plans for this former persecutor, and Ananias was appointed to break the bottle of champagne over the bow of the good ship Saul. What a privilege!

Ananias went right to his task. Finding Saul, he greeted him with an amazing statement of grace: “Brother Saul...” What must Saul have thought upon hearing this? “Do I know you? How is it we are brothers?” He would learn soon enough.

Ananias did not explain everything the Lord had said to him. Jesus had said *He* would take care of that. Ananias only led Saul to *his next step*, which is what good leaders do. The falling away of (*something* like) scales from Saul’s eyes is meant both realistically and symbolically. His eyes had been seared by the blinding light of Christ, but now, his confusion was being dispelled, and he was beginning to “see” clearly. Conversion to Christ is both sudden and complete, and gradual and growing.

The name of “Gentiles” must have raised a few questions in Ananias’ mind. “What do the Gentiles have to do with this?” That scorned name, mentioned in the same sentence with the “children of Israel”, could have only one meaning: Jesus was aiming His grace toward the Gentiles, and the meaning and mention of *that* name would be forever changed. Further, He was going to begin that effort among “the disciples” (v. 19) right here, in Damascus, a *Gentile* city which had been an enemy of Israel as long as anyone could remember.

Christ’s way of pursuing His ongoing work never ceases to surprise and amaze.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

As confusing to Saul as the greeting of “Brother” from Ananias must have been, can you imagine how difficult it must have been for Ananias to say it? To lovingly “brother” someone who had murdered and imprisoned countless Christians? That must have been a stretch in faith and grace for Ananias.

But isn't that what God's grace is all about? I'm talking about the grace that is lovingly shown to each one of us when we accept this gift from Jesus, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2.24).

Our thankfulness to God, for this unearned and undeserved gift, is shown to Him by the grace we show to others. Exactly like Ananias showed to Saul.

“And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4.33).

“Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” (Eph. 6.24).

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12.28, 29).

“...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3.18).

If we are truly praying that the world will be saved, we must prepare ourselves with “Ananias grace” for those God chooses to save! Because look out, they may even be as disreputable as we. (1 Tim. 1.15) And as much in need of hearing “Brother Saul” as we, at one time, were.

What does the Lord require of us?

To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God (Mic. 6.8).

Which sounds a lot like “Ananias grace”.

For reflection

1. How have you seen God's grace at work through you?
2. In your Personal Mission Field, are there any “unlikely candidates” to receive Jesus? Are they beyond the reach of God's grace? Explain.
3. What do we mean by saying that grace works in “next steps”?

... it is the Lord's glory to surpass our scanty expectations, and show that those are vessels of his mercy whom we are apt to consider as objects of his vengeance. The teaching of the Holy Spirit takes away the scales of ignorance and pride from the understanding; then the sinner becomes a new creature, and endeavors to recommend the anointed Savior, the Son of God, to his former companions. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 9.10-22

Pray Psalm 78.4-7.

Pray for the children of your church, and for all the study groups where people gather to seek the Lord in His Word. Pray that they will all increase in the Lord and in keeping His commandments.

Sing Psalm 78.4-7.

(Foundation: *How Firm a Foundation*)

The glorious deeds of our God in His might,
and all of the works He has done in our sight,
together with all of the words of His Law,
would we on ourselves and our children bestow.

Lord, let all our children arise and declare

What's in a Name?: Acts 9

the truth of the Lord every day, everywhere,
and set all their hopes in God's wonderful Word,
and never forget all the works of the Lord.

4 Shades of Jericho

Pray Psalm 55.1-3.

Give ear to my prayer, O God,
And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.
Attend to me, and hear me;
I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily,
Because of the voice of the enemy,
Because of the oppression of the wicked;
For they bring down trouble upon me,
And in wrath they hate me.

Sing Psalm 55.1-3.

(Bread of Life: [*Break Thou the Bread of Life*](#))

Hear now my prayer, O Lord, hide not from me.
Answer me by Your Word and set me free!
Wicked men sore oppress; restless am I.
Lord, ease my soul's distress and hear my cry!

Read Acts 9.1-25; meditate on verses 19-25.

Preparation

1. What did Saul do while he was in Damascus?
2. How did the Jews of Damascus respond?

Meditation

Saul began immediately to preach, and his message was singular: Jesus is the Son of God (v. 20), the Messiah (v. 22). Wrapped up in that would have been all the prophesies of a coming Kingdom, of the Spirit of God, and the promises to Abraham. The Gospel is about Jesus – Who He is, what He's done, what He commands. It's not about people and their perceived needs.

It's not surprising that Jewish leaders resented having their precious heritage “stolen” and “retooled” for the Christian cause. Saul's escape from Damascus reminds us of Rahab's concealing then delivering the spies of Israel, prior to the assault on Jericho under Joshua's leadership. Now a new “Joshua” was preparing to invade Damascus and all the Gentile world, and His messenger had to be let down in a basket to escape the wrath of the religious leaders.

Saul's ministry may have had inauspicious beginnings, like the spies in Jericho, but big things were coming, and that right soon. These early days of Saul's ministry were a portent of things to come; the reaction to him and the Good News he proclaimed would be pretty much the same wherever he would go (cf. Acts 17.32-34).

Luke is getting his readers ready. Here we find the Gentile world, or one part of it, in the *preparation* stage for the ongoing work of Christ. Granted, Saul's ministry seems to have been to Jews (vv. 20, 22). But the Word was being preached to the chosen people of God in a pagan city and world. Such is always the case with the ongoing work of Christ, and with our work in our Personal Mission Fields. We need to prepare accordingly, and scatter Kingdom seeds by every means and at every opportunity.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Saul was brought up under the teaching of Gamaliel. As he said: “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death...” (Acts 22.3, 4).

And now the astute words of Gamaliel are ringing true for his student Saul: “if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God” (Acts 5.39). Saul was fighting against it, but it proved impossible for him because he was, in fact, fighting against and persecuting Jesus. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9.5).

Now the tables have turned, and Saul is the one hunted. “Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him...they watched the gates day and night, to kill him” (Acts 9.23, 24).

It seems in all of history, the enemies of God never learn. And they never take to heart the words of Gamaliel. Or the words of Jesus.

But the words of Jesus are meant to encourage us, not to warn others. The warning is for us. And Saul. He took it to heart and was not a bit surprised by the antagonism with which he was met. He had, after all, written the book on *How to Persecute the Church*.

So let us learn from these words of Jesus, take them to heart, and go forth to serve Him, being ready for whatever comes our way. The enemies are still playing by the same tired *How To* book.

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5.11, 12).

And Peter adds: “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings...” (1 Pet. 4.12, 13).

We may have to be let down through a wall; still, the truth is for us to tell! “He is the Son of God” (Acts 9.20).

For reflection

1. Should we expect everyone to believe the Gospel? Why or why not? Should that deter our witness?
2. What is our responsibility toward our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted for their faith?
3. We need to help and encourage one another in our witness for Christ. Whom will you encourage today?

If the Jewish leaders had caught the Damascus disciples helping Saul pursue his service to the Lord, the result probably would have been widespread persecution. In ancient times city walls contained all kinds of openings—windows without glass. Saul’s escape here recalls the spies’ escape from Jericho in Josh. 2:15... Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Note on Acts 9.25

Pray Psalm 55.16-23.

Pray for our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters, that God would strengthen them to bear up under their trial, and that He would restrain, shame, and even convert their tormentors.

Sing Psalm 55.16-23.

(Bread of Life: [*Break Thou the Bread of Life*](#))

What's in a Name?: Acts 9

Lord, I will call on You, answer and save!
Morning and evening too, my voice I raise.
Grant me Your peace, O Lord; answer my foes!
All who reject God's Word He overthrows.

Many assail, O Lord, many betray.
See how they draw their sword across my way.
Take up my burden, Lord; strengthen and bless!
Let judgment by Your Word their souls distress.

5 Barnabas (Again)

Pray Psalm 115.1-3.

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
Why should the Gentiles say,
“So where *is* their God?”
But our God *is* in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.

Sing Psalm 115.1-3.

(Plainfield: [*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*](#))

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!
Why should the nations cry, “Where is their God on high?”
You rule us, Lord, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Read Acts 9.1-31; meditate on verses 26-31.

Preparation

1. How did the disciples in Jerusalem respond to Saul?
2. What was he doing in Jerusalem? Where did the apostles send him?

Meditation

The disciples in Jerusalem were reluctant, as we might imagine, to believe Saul’s story about having been converted to Christ. But Barnabas – whom we met in chapter 4, and who was singled out for his selfless generosity – saw something there, something genuine, and he took Saul’s side and made it possible for him to continue his ministry among the saints at Jerusalem.

Things had apparently quieted down a bit in Jerusalem, and it seems the persecution against Christians had waned. Trust Saul to crank it up again (v. 29), not because of anything in his character or methods, but just because of his uncompromising proclamation of Jesus and His Kingdom.

For Saul’s sake and safety, the leaders in Jerusalem pack him off to his home because, well, people are always trying to kill him. We don’t know why this destination was chosen, other than that’s where he was from, or what instructions accompanied him. We do know, however, that when Antioch needed a pastor, Barnabas knew Saul would be their man (Acts 11).

Meanwhile, a season of rest settled on the Church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

We note that Luke refers to the “church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria” and not to the “churches” (NKJV has “churches” but consult the marginal note). The believers thought of themselves as one body; the name *church* is used to designate, in Acts and the New Testament, the population of believers in a particular region (as here), those in a community, those gathering in homes, and the Body of Christ universal. It’s all the Church. Luke used this name at this point to help lay a foundation and prepare us for what will begin to be more obvious in chapters 10-15.

Saul – soon to be Paul – is a disruptive person. But then, when you're engaged in turning the world upside-down for Christ (Acts 17.1-9), that's what you might expect. We need disrupters like Saul. And we need comforters and encouragers like Barnabas. Each of these is a work of the Holy Spirit, and each of us who believes in Jesus needs a little bit of both.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles” (Acts 9.27).

Only a man full of the Holy Spirit could, or would, do something this courageous. Something this encouraging. An act like this: so full of love, mercy, and kindness.

“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins” (Prov. 10.12).

“He has shown you, O man, what is good;

and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly,

to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6.8).

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?” (Matt. 5.44-46)

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15.12).

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13. 8, 10).

“Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (I Cor. 13.4-8).

I wonder if Paul, formerly known as Saul, was thinking about Barnabas when he wrote those words in Romans and Corinthians about love? Was he remembering the mercy, grace, kindness, and love shown to him by this dear brother in Christ? I think perhaps he was.

This is the kind of love that turns the world upside-down and rightside-up. It is the aroma of life leading to life that freshens the world (2 Cor. 2.16).

“...clearly you are an epistle of Christ...written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh that is, of the heart” (2 Cor. 3.3).

Clearly this was Barnabas. Again. But it can be us, too!

For reflection

1. What can you learn from Barnabas about working your Personal Mission Field?
2. Paul's boldness and courage are certainly admirable. How can we be more like that?
3. Why is the Gospel sometimes a “disruptive” influence? Is that a good thing? Explain.

The professors of the gospel walked uprightly, and enjoyed much comfort from the Holy Ghost, in the hope and peace of the gospel, and others were won over to them. They lived upon the comfort of the Holy Ghost, not only in the days of trouble and affliction, but in days of rest and prosperity. Those are most likely to walk cheerfully, who walk circumspectly. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on Acts 9.23-31*

Pray Psalm 115.9-11.

Declare anew your trust in the Lord and your confidence in Him as your Shield and protector. Pray that He will help you to increase in Jesus, and to encourage others to grow in Him as well. Pray that you may be faithful to work your portion of the earth, your Personal Mission Field, for His glory alone.

Sing Psalm 115.9-11.

(Plainfield: [*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*](#))

All who trust in Jesus yield – ever to His Name be glory! –
find in Him their help and shield – ever to Your Name be glory!
O Israel, trust the Lord! He helps us evermore!
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious Lord – ever to Your Name be glory –
will attend us evermore – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless all who fear You, Lord, all who obey Your Word,
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless us with eternal peace – ever to Your Name be glory!
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

6 Aeneas and Dorcas

Pray Psalm 95.1, 2, 6.

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD!
Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;
Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms...
Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

Sing Psalm 95.1, 2, 6.

(Tidings: [*O Zion, Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*](#))

Come, let us sing with joy to God, our Savior!
Let us with joy to Him, our Rock, bow down!
Come now before Him, grateful for His favor;
let joyful psalms break forth from all around.

Refrain v. 6

Come let us worship, kneel to our Lord;
worship our Maker: Father, Holy Spirit, Word.

Read Acts 9.1-43; meditate on verses 32-43.

Preparation

1. Which apostle returns to center stage in these verses?
2. What does he do?

Meditation

Before we become too swept up in the ministry of Saul of Tarsus, Luke returns us to the Gospel's roots – Peter, the Rock. In Lydda Peter “found” (was he looking for him?) a man who had been paralyzed for eight years (vv. 32, 33). There must have been many such people in Roman Judea at this time. Why this man, Luke? Peter preached the Gospel to him, and he was made well (v. 34). The response in Lydda and Sharon was not unlike what we saw in Jerusalem and Samaria (v. 35).

“Aeneas” is not a Jewish name. It was, with slight modification, a *Roman* name. Peter ministering to a Gentile? More than that, Aeneas was the name of the refugee from Troy who supposedly *founded* the city of Rome! Whoa, Luke! What are you trying to say? Are you suggesting Rome is going to hear the Gospel? Maybe be *transformed* by the Gospel?

The death of Dorcas was a great loss to her community in Joppa (vv. 36, 37). She was a woman of many good works and good gifts, who created and bestowed delightful artifacts of culture on appreciative friends. For now, she lay dead, her body being made ready for burial. Peter prayed, then called the woman to arise (v. 40). And she did.

The raising of Dorcas has predicable results: more believers added to the Lord (vv. 41, 42). Dorcas and Tabitha both mean “gazelle.” We wonder why Luke chose to include this story. A “gazelle” who is a maker of lovely cultural artifacts, a doer of many good works, lies dead; the Word of the Gospel restores her to life, and awakening breaks out in Joppa. Is Luke suggesting that the Gospel brings restoration to creation and culture? That this is part of the ongoing work of Christ?

The Gospel was breaking out all over the place, saving multitudes, healing many, restoring the world, sowing hope, bristling with power, making all things new, and aiming at farther horizons still.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Good works are always so good. So nice. So satisfying. But unless the good works have a point, they have no real purpose.

In Lydda and Joppa the point of the good works had eternal consequences: “So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw [Aeneas healed] and turned to the Lord” (Acts 9.35).

And in Joppa the same result: “And [Tabitha’s restored life] became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord” (Acts 9.42).

As Jesus taught His disciples: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5.16). On point.

Paul adds this reminder as we do our good works: “...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life...” (Phil. 2.13-16).

Peter’s faithful good works gave healing to Aeneas and Dorcas; and they gave eternal hope to those who observed. Good works done in Jesus’ Name are always a blessing.

*Out in the highways and byways of life, Many are weary and sad;
Carry the sunshine where darkness is rife, Making the sorrowing glad.
Make me a blessing, make me a blessing,
Out of my life may Jesus shine;
Make me a blessing, O Savior, I pray,
Make me a blessing to someone to today.
(Wilson, 1909/Schuler,1924)*

For reflection

1. What opportunities for doing good are before you in your Personal Mission Field today?
2. How do today’s verses stretch your vision of the Gospel and its impact?
3. *Being* a witness for Jesus (Acts 1.8) involves good works and true words. Explain.

Power went along with the word, and Dorcas came to life. Thus in the raising of dead souls to spiritual life, the first sign of life is the opening of the eyes of the mind. Here we see that the Lord can make up every loss; that he overrules every event for the good of those who trust in him, and for the glory of his name. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 9.36-43

Pray Psalm 95.3-11.

Pray that the Good News of God’s salvation will ring out from His people over all the earth, and that multitudes will hear, believe, and be saved.

Sing Psalm 95.3-11.

(Tidings: [*O Zion, Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*](#))

Great are You, Lord, a King above all nations.
All of earth’s depths lie hidden in Your hand.

Yours are the mountains, Yours the sea, You made it;
You by Your hands created the dry land.

Refrain v. 6

Come let us worship, kneel to our Lord;
worship our Maker: Father, Holy Spirit, Word.

You are our God, we are Your sheep, Your people:
Speak, Lord, and let us hearken to Your Word.
Let not our hearts grow hard through sin, and feeble,
as when our fathers sinned against You, Lord.

Refrain

Long years You loathed that wicked generation,
who in their hearts, rebelled against Your path.
Them You forsook, and kept from Your salvation;
them You subjected to Your fearsome wrath.

Refrain

7 Namely

Pray Psalm 72.7, 8.

In His days the righteous shall flourish,
And abundance of peace,
Until the moon is no more.
He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.

Sing Psalm 72.7, 8.

(Martyrdom: [*Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*](#))

Let righteousness abundant be where Jesus' reign endures.
Let peace increase from sea to sea 'til moonlight shall be no more.

Read Acts 9.1-43; meditate on verses 3-6.

Preparation

1. Whom was Saul persecuting? How?
2. What did Jesus tell him to do?

Meditation

You probably noticed that names play a big role in Acts 9. We could say that Acts 9 is a very “namely” chapter, for the many names mentioned there. Each of these has a purpose in Luke’s narrative of the ongoing work of Christ, telling or foreshadowing something about the Gospel and its effects. They are historically accurate, even while, symbolically, they point to matters beyond themselves.

Consider: Three names were in some sense rescued from ignominy (Saul, Judas, Ananias). Two names represent the ethnic poles of Jesus’ Acts 1.8 mandate (Jerusalem, Damascus). He whose name was prominent for encouragement to the first Christian community brought encouragement to Saul at a time when he truly needed it (Barnabas). Two names suggest the extent of the Gospel’s healing and transforming power (Aeneas, Tabitha). What’s in a name?

We see this use of names for larger purposes in various places in Scripture. Abram, “father of a people”, became Abraham, “father of many peoples.” Jacob the deceiver became Israel who strove with God. Simon the unstable became Peter, the Rock. And Saul of Tarsus would become Paul the apostle.

So let’s consider these names as road markers along our journey through Acts. They signal what’s up ahead, what’s to come, and they hint at a Gospel of barrier-breaking, world-transforming, reconciling and restoring, all-things-newing power because of one supreme Name – Jesus.

And most of what follows will unfold around the name of him who persecuted Jesus, and found forgiveness, life, hope, and a new mission in life.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

On his way to a deadly mission, Saul encountered the life-giving Name of Jesus. Suddenly a light shone. Saul fell to the ground in fear. Then he heard a voice and asked, “Who are You, Lord?” The reply, “I AM Jesus.” (Acts 9.5)

That Name. At *that* Name “every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2.10, 11).

As God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3.14).

And as God said to Isaiah, “I AM God, and there is no other; I AM God, and there is none like Me...” (Is. 46.9)

Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (Jn. 8.58).

“I AM the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11.25).

“I AM the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14.6).

God uses names for many purposes. God changes names for many reasons. But there is one Name that never needed changing for any purpose or any reason. And that Name belongs to our beloved Savior and Lord. “Jesus Christ IS the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13.8).

Namely: The Alpha and Omega. Immanuel. King of kings and Lord of lords. The Light of the world. Prince of Peace. Lamb of God. The Good Shepherd. Bread of Life. Chief Cornerstone. Messiah. The Word of God. Always. I AM.

For reflection

1. Which of the many names given to Jesus do you find most glorious and helpful in your times of need? Why?

2. How should we be helped by knowing that Jesus has called us by name, and we are His (Is. 43.1)?

3. How do the various names for Jesus teach us to think about the scope of the Gospel?

A good work was begun in Saul, when he was brought to Christ's feet with those words, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And never did Christ leave any who were brought to that. Behold, the proud Pharisee, the unmerciful oppressor, the daring blasphemer, prayeth! And thus it is even now, and with the proud infidel, or the abandoned sinner. What happy tidings are these to all who understand the nature and power of prayer, of such prayer as the humbled sinner presents for the blessings of free salvation! Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on Acts 9.10-22

Pray Psalm 72.15-20.

Pray for the coming of God's Kingdom and with it, all the promises of His covenant. Pray that Jesus may be exalted and worshiped in all the earth.

Sing Psalm 72.15-20.

(Martyrdom: [*Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*](#))

Let Christ be praised, and all the gold of Sheba be His right;
let blessings to His Name be told, and prayers made both day and night.

And let the earth abound with grain, let fields His fame proclaim.
And may our King forever reign and nations bless His great Name.

Now bless the God of Israel Who wondrous works performs.
And bless His Name, His glory tell both now and forevermore!

What's in a Name?: Acts 9

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you describe the power of the Gospel, as you see it working in Acts 9?
2. Does this chapter enlarge your view of the ongoing work of Christ in any ways? Explain.
3. Do you experience the ongoing work of Christ in the ways indicated and suggested in Acts 9? Explain.
4. Where does your church fit in with the idea of *church* as we've seen it thus far in the book of Acts? Do you use the word *church* to mean the same thing we're seeing in Acts? Explain.
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 9?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

Thank you.