

**A Talk by B. Cobbey Crisler,
“After the Master What? – The Book of Acts” (Acts 9)**

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Acts, Chapter 9, introduces us to a prominent character in the history of Christianity. Although we have referred to him earlier, through his persecutions of the early Christians.

But here we find that “Saul, breathing out threatenings and slaughter,” and you can appreciate that the Elizabethan terminology here hides some of the impact of some of the real meaning. (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter
against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

Saul had received authority from the temple to persecute Christians – to find wherever they were, all the way to Damascus and bring them back bound to Jerusalem.

Acts 9:2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues,
that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women,
he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Notice in Acts 9, verse 2, the earliest form of reference to Christianity is “of this way.”

If he found any “of this way,” literally in Greek, “of the way.” And this is the first descriptive title for Christianity.

“Saul is quite equal in his treatment of men and women. He brings both bound into Jerusalem.” (See below, repeated for convenience, paraphrased)

[Acts 9:2](#) And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

But, “on his way, near Damascus, something happens to Saul. He has a vision, and a great light shines about him.” (See below, paraphrased)

[Acts 9:3](#) And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

Now, the Book of Acts gives us three different versions of this vision. But, we won't go into them in detail when we get to the later chapters.

Chapter 9, is the first version, by Luke, the author of the book of Acts of Saul's' experience on the road. It's told in the third person; however, later in the Book of Acts, we have in the 22nd Chapter and in the 26th Chapter, Paul, himself, in defending his record and his career, refers to this extraordinary experience on the road to Damascus.

Details vary, and it's important for the student of the Book of Acts to compare them. It's not that they are contradictory necessarily. As one commentary has pointed out: There need be no contradiction, and there may not be a contradiction.

If we knew more of Paul's life, and if we had one other source that could fill in many of the details, it is possible that all the versions would dovetail very nicely.

There is one other brief reference to the experience near Damascus in Paul's own words in his Letter to the Galatians, the first Chapter, verses 13 to 16. (See below.)

[Gal 1:13](#) For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

[Gal 1:14](#) And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

Gal 1:16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

Now, let's focus on the incident as recorded in Acts, Chapter 9, noticing that the vision that is vouchsafed Paul is to an unbeliever. And it's occurring outside Palestine, almost as if to emphasize the universality of the Christian mission, taking it already outside of Jerusalem.

The light that falls upon Saul may be as much a light within as without. Whatever it was, it leaves him **blind**, almost as if by contrast to what he has known before in his life.

"A voice is heard saying to Paul, 'Why persecutest thou me?'" (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

The question is then, "Who art thou, Lord?" (See below)

Acts 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

The answer, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." (See above)

Now, there is a significant point because Jesus is certainly not present physically. He had long since disappeared in the ascension.

And yet, this voice to Paul certainly implies that a persecution of the church is equivalent to persecution of its founder, as if the message and messenger are inseparable.

The voice of Jesus continues, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." (See below, repeated)

Acts 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

This is a very common Greek proverb. The Anchor Bible suggests the following translation: “From now on it will be difficult for you to kick again the goad.”

What basically do you think Jesus is telling Paul here? Who is it hurting when Paul is persecuting the church? It’s hurting him, isn’t it? Paul himself.

Well, “trembling and astonished, his response is ‘Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?’” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

And his instructions are “to go into the city, and it will be told him what he must do.” (See above, paraphrased)

Now, in the 26th Chapter of Acts, we get an entirely different version here. As a matter of fact, in verses 16-18 of Acts 26, have lengthy instructions given to Saul at this point by Jesus. (See below)

Acts 26:16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

Acts 26:17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Also, in verse 7, where the men are recorded in Acts, Chapter 9 here as “hearing a voice but seeing no one.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

The version in Acts 22, verse 9, is exactly the opposite. “They see this light, but they do not really hear an articulate voice.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

When “Saul rises from the earth, he is blind, and they must lead him into Damascus.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 22:8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

A scholar going into the dates of the Book of Acts, has estimated this event could not have been earlier than thirty-four A.D. (34 A.D.)

Saul has plenty of time to think about what has hit him. “For three days he cannot see, and during that long period, he doesn’t eat or drink.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 22:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

At this point, “a vision occurs to a disciple named Ananias, who is located at Damascus.” (See below, paraphrased)

10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

“Ananias is told to go and meet Saul and to heal him.” (See below, paraphrased)

11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

Now if you were Ananias, you'd think that you would be extremely eager to meet the one who had a warrant to arrest anyone who named the name of Christ and had the authority to take them back to Jerusalem.

Well, Ananias was no more eager than we would have been. In Acts 9, verse 13, you can see that “he actually records what they knew in Damascus already about Saul's reputation, how much evil he had done to the saints at Jerusalem.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

Acts 9:14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

But the message to Ananias gives us what Saul's appointed mission will now be. “He is a chosen vessel.” (See below, partial)

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

Chosen to do what? Alright, (he is chosen) “to bear my name before the Gentiles.” (See above, partial)

We have seen Philip bring the gospel to the Samaritans, but here Saul is set apart, specifically, as being the one who will carry Christianity around the known globe. And this, as we know, he does, in less than a generation.

When Ananias meets him, speaks with him, in Acts 9, verse 17, “from Saul’s eyes fall scales – his past outlook dropping away completely. And he was seeing things from an entirely new point of view.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Acts 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Acts 9:19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

“It is not very long before Saul is actively engaged in preaching “the way.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Notice in Acts 9, verse 20, where we are told “he straightway preached Christ, or the Messiah, in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” (See above, paraphrased)

There is point one in the preaching of Paul that “the Messiah in Bible prophecy is also the Son of God.” (See above, paraphrased)

You can imagine what those who heard him must have thought since they already had been well acquainted with Saul’s reputation earlier.

Here was “the key persecutor of Christianity now preaching in the name of Jesus.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

Acts 9, verse 22, gives us the second point in “Paul’s preaching, showing that he used the scriptures, obviously, to prove that Jesus was the Messiah.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

This was his technique, his method. There was no other way, was there, to convince a group of intelligent Jews, well trained in the Scriptures that anyone could have been a claimant to the Messiah unless he went back to the authority of the Scriptures? So, Acts 9, verse 22, tells us “he proved that this is the very Christ.” (See above, paraphrased)

That brings up a question for us as students of this account in the Book of Acts. Why is it that Saul, without any indication of instruction humanly on the point, suddenly is so thoroughly convinced that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies?

Let’s remember that Saul is the first real scholar to become converted to Christianity. We have dealt with fishermen. Saul is a Pharisee and a son of a Pharisee, the student of Gamaliel, one of the most highly respected rabbis (rabbanim) in Jewish history.

He knew the Scriptures inside and out. Once he grasped that Jesus not only fulfilled the scripture, but his very life opened up as a key does in a lock, passages of scripture that the Jewish nation has never focused upon before.

Where did he get this concept and idea? Is it possible that unrecorded in the account, the walk to Damascus for Paul was also the walk to Emmaus?

Did that great light which came upon him illumine the scriptures as well? Did everything suddenly come together for Saul? -- all his previous Bible instruction lifted out of ritual, out of theory, into the living fulfillment of the present with Jesus as the prophesied Messiah?

Well, Acts 9, verse 23, shows us that it does not take very long before the same techniques of persecution are applied to Saul as he had applied to Christians earlier.

The entire city of Damascus is watched. [“The gates are guarded with the intent to assassinate Saul when the opportunity arose.”](#) (See below, paraphrased)

[Acts 9:23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:](#)

[Acts 9:24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.](#)

Saul's favorite escape occurred: [“His disciples take him in the middle of the night and carefully let him down the wall in a basket.”](#) (See below, paraphrased)

[Acts 9:25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.](#)

This must have meant a great deal to Paul because he does refer to it at least one other time. One might say that Saul, at least at this moment in his history, was putting all his “exits” in one basket. (No response...“Sorry.”)

Now, Saul arrives at Jerusalem and wants to join the disciples, but [“the disciples have the same feeling that Ananias had: they don't want to have](#)

anything to do with him. How could such a radical change in character have occurred?” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

“But Barnabas” in Acts 9, verse 27, that wonderful apostle who we have been introduced to earlier who had given all of his possessions to the disciples and sold everything. “Barnabas brings Paul directly to the disciples.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Now, here we have a variation – the Acts account and the account in the first chapter of Galatians.

For in Galatians Paul tells us “that he only saw two apostles.” (See below, paraphrased)

Gal 1:18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

Gal 1:19 But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.

Now, Acts doesn’t specify how many apostles he saw, so this is an indication of how both accounts could dovetail. But in Galatians, “Paul tells us that he only visited privately Peter and James and was there for fifteen days.” (See above, paraphrased)

Acts 9:28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

Acts 9:29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

After this visit you will notice from Acts 9, verse 30, that “Saul is conducted to Caesarea and then on to Tarsus” which is his home town. (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

The persecution now has been nipped in the bud.

Acts 9, verse 31 shows us that the churches have rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria.” (See below, paraphrased)

Notice the plural reference to “churches.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Churches related to the head church or the headquarters church, the Mother Church in Jerusalem.

Now the scene shifts back to Peter. Peter arrives at Lydda close to where the modern International airport is today in the land of Israel near the town of Lud which is preserved the name, the ancient name, in that form.

And at Lydda Peter finds a man named “Aeneas who for eight years has been paralyzed, unable to move.” But Peter coming near to Aeneas makes one very simple statement to him: “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:33 And there he found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

Acts 9:34 And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

After all he hadn't been able to move for eight years, and the first thing Peter says to him is "make your bed." (See above, partial)

We find that same thing, and Peter himself saw it, in the account in the gospel of John when, both Peter and the disciple Jesus loved, appear at the tomb of Jesus.

The stone had been rolled away, and they look inside. And what did those two disciples see there? There is no body of Jesus, but right next to the stone slab they find the linen garments and the napkin have all been folded very neatly and laid to one side for if Jesus, himself, looking around at that tomb after such a breakthrough in his victory over death. If he utilized his hands, despite the holes from the nails, and even arranged in order, the human environment in that tomb, it shows how important that sense of order is, not only in thought but in its outward expression.

So, here "Peter says to Aeneas: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately." (See below, repeated, paraphrased)

Acts 9:34 And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

It didn't take long for the news to get around that this kind of healing work was being accomplished by the early Christians.

In a neighboring "town of Joppa we find a woman named Tabitha." (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

“She had had an exemplary life, had done much good for many.” (See above, paraphrased)

“Peter comes right away.” (See below, paraphrased)

Acts 9:39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

Do you recall back in the narratives of the gospel where a similar situation occurred, and Peter was there? It was the raising of Jairus’s daughter. (See below)

Acts 9:40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

Acts 9:41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

Acts 9:42 And it was known throughout all Joppa;

Do you remember when Jesus came into that environment that you could almost cut it into square blocks of moisture, the grief was so thick? There were paid mourners at that point. As a matter of fact, we are told that even the poorest individual was entitled to at least three instruments at the funeral service. You can imagine Jairus, being a ruler of the Synagogue, the extent of noise, and activity, and mourning that must have occurred at the passing of Jairus’s daughter.