

Acts 9 Exegetical Meditation



Saul means “prayed for.” Paul means “little one.” In Acts 9, we see Saul get knocked off his high horse (where the expression comes from) and humbled to the point of acceptance of a new identity. Our Lord elected him in divine plan to bring the message of salvation to the Gentiles. Let’s take a look at his conversion and the beginnings of his apostolic work.

Acts 9 Breakdown:

- The conversion of Saul to Paul- Acts 9:1-9
- The calling of Ananias and Paul’s conversion- Acts 9:10-18
- Paul preaches in Damascus- Acts 9:19-25
- Paul before the Apostles in Jerusalem- Acts 9:26-30
- Peter’s Apostolic visits to Lydda and Joppa- Acts 9:31-43

Saul traveled to Damascus in order to continue to persecute Christians. On the way he was literally blinded by a light and dumbfounded by a voice. The voice proclaimed “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4) Confused, Saul says “Who are you, sir?” (Acts 9:5). To Saul, he could not understand what this could mean. He was not persecuting an individual. He was persecuting individuals. Jesus responds “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9:5-6). Notice, Jesus equates Christians with His very self. Paul comes to understand this mystical reality greater than anybody in the history of the world. His mission to proclaim the mystery of the union between Christ and His Bride, the Church is about to begin.

After arriving in Damascus with a 180 degree change in plans, God appoints a man named Ananias to baptize St Paul. Jesus’s declaration to Ananias of Paul’s special election leaves Ananias confused, but he humbly accepts in a Marian manner. Ananias baptizes Paul, and “immediately things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his eyes and he regained his sight. He got up and was baptized” (Acts 9:18). Remember, Paul literally fell to the ground and lost his sight from a divine light. Now, he literally regains his footing from the divine light of grace.

Paul immediately preaches with his newfound power of grace. The suddenness and intensity of the change left the audience of Damascus amazed. The Jewish elites in Damascus and in Jerusalem heard of the news and conspired to kill him. Thankfully, Paul heard of the news and he was able to escape with the help of his fellow Christians to the Apostles. At first, the Apostles were afraid. The text could give the impression that they were scared of Paul, but that is not the case. They simply did not fully trust Paul. St Barnabas, Paul's friend since their time as young men under the mentorship of Gamaliel, stood up for Paul and convinced the apostles of his authentic conversion. Paul will come roaring back onto the scene in a few chapters.

The chapter concludes with a couple of miracle stories through the instrument Peter, the first pope. I see these two stories as kind of like a modern-day apostolic visit of a pope. The text states that "As Peter was passing through every region, he went down to the holy ones living in Lydda" (Acts 9:32). Peter clearly understood his office as leader of the apostles, and it is clear throughout the gospels and throughout Acts that the Apostles and the entire Church treated him as such as well. In these two stories we see him imitate Jesus to a tee. First in Lydda, Jesus heals a man named Aeneas stating "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed" (Acts 9:34). The parallel to Christ's healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda is impossible to miss (see John 5:1-18). Secondly, Peter's healing of Tabitha in Joppa is clearly a parallel to the raising of the daughter of Jairus (see Matthew 9:18-26) and Lazarus (see John 11:1-44). In speech and in action, Peter practically replicates the events of Christ.