

Witness a Transformed Life
From Chief of Sinners to the Captain of Saints
(Acts 9:1-31)

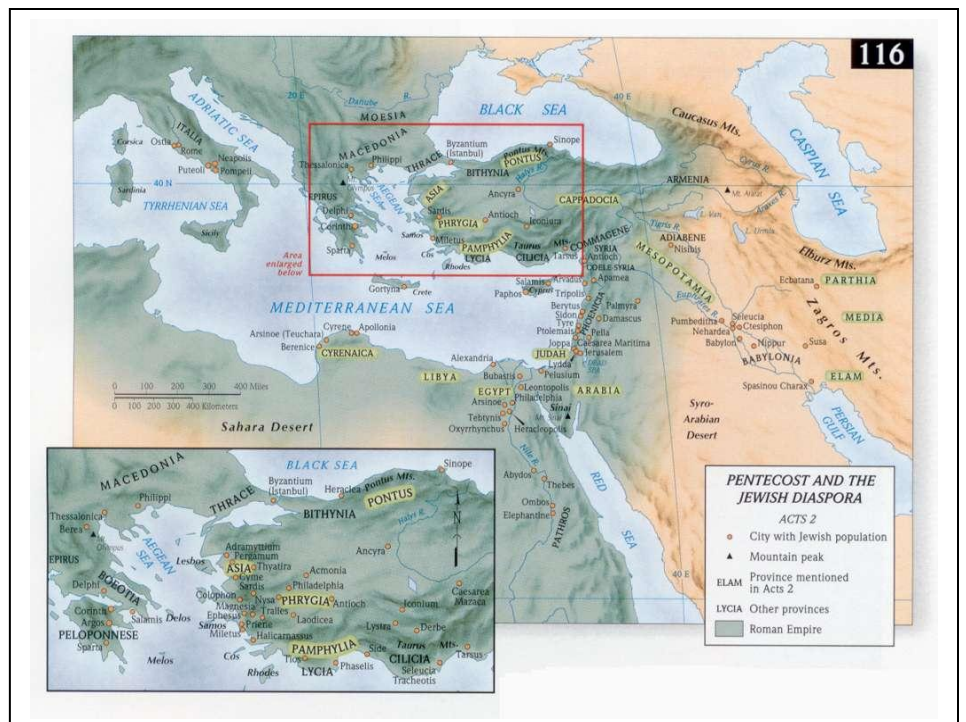
Introduction:

1. The second most significant event (following the events surrounding the Day of Pentecost) to be recorded in the Book of Acts would probably be the conversion of Saul (Paul).
 - I don't want to lessen the first 8 chapters of Acts where we could certainly identify some pretty significant events in which God moved in a miraculous way where lives were clearly changed.
 - What transpires here on the road to Damascus (Paul's conversion) goes beyond just a recorded experience. The immediate and long term results of Paul's conversion will have such an enormous impact; that the church and the world will be forever in his debt - for Paul will live out this transformed life before our very eyes!
 - Luke will actually record Paul's conversion three times. (Acts 9, 22, 26)
2. Saul's conversion will mark a significant transition in which the primary focus shifts to the Gospel being taken to the Gentiles.
3. Let's recap a little as to what transpired before Saul's conversion:
 - _____ had just been martyred for boldly declaring that Jesus was the Messiah.

- This led the religious leaders to attempt to crush this movement by intimidating, persecuting and even killing those who spoke out against their “Jewish Laws”.
 - 1) This is a good time to point out that believing in Jesus does not violate “Mosaic Law” and in fact we can conclude He was a fulfillment of it.
 - 2) It was often the man made “Jewish Laws” (see The Mishna), that were created in the days between the Old and New Testament which caused a significant division between what Jesus taught and what the Jewish religious leaders taught.
 - 3) These man made “Jewish Laws” became the foundation of what is known as _____.
 - 4) As such; the Jewish religious leaders were finding themselves threatened by this uneducated band of fisherman and losing hold on their status and control over their own people.
- Paul will be dispatched to go and round up these rebels and bring them to justice and this is where we pick up from our last lesson. (Acts 9:1-2)
 - 1) Paul will gather the proper credentials and papers that grant him permission to arrest these Christians.
 - 2) While on his way to bring these Christians back to Jerusalem to be tried, he will travel toward Damascus believing there was a group of believers there. While he is on his way to Damascus; he will meet Jesus and his life will forever be changed.

4. Why would God choose Paul?

- He had some very unique qualifications (Philippians 3:4-9):
 - 1) He was born a _____
 - 2) He was a _____ citizen
 - 3) He had solid training within the _____ system of education.
- After his conversion he would go on to become a _____, _____, and perhaps the greatest defender of the Christian faith that ever walked the earth.
- Saul's birthplace was _____ (Acts 21:39)
 - 1) It was located in the Roman province of _____, not far from **Antioch** (the place where Paul would begin his missionary journey's and also the place where the name "Christian" was used to identify those of "The Way"), which is where Asia Minor and Syria meet.



- 2) Tarsus was home to a university that equaled that of Alexandria and Athens and was highly honored within the Roman world.
 - 3) He was a Pharisee (just like his father) and studied under the master teacher of his day named _____.
- Perhaps Paul was one of those Hellenistic Jews who were unsuccessful in debating with Stephen (Acts 6:9-10) and as such even a ringleader or mastermind in his death (Acts 8:1-3). This would easily account for Paul's description of himself as "Chief among Sinners"
 - Paul is now in active pursuit of those Christians who fled Jerusalem to other cities. Listen to Paul's later testimony to Agrippa; "So then I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities". (Acts 26:9-11)
 - What man may mean for harm – God can make it good!
 - 1) Saul was on his way to Damascus where he would find people of "The Way" (**These were believers who followed Jesus – The Way, The Truth and The Life**), and his plan was to round them up and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and eventual death.
 - 2) Although this was Saul's plan – God had other plans which would not only alter the life of Saul, but would also impact the world in such a way that many Gentiles would come to know the Lord as a result of his conversion!

A Transformed Life Evidenced By Faith: (Acts 9:3-9)

1. The account found in Acts 26:15-18 in which Paul is giving his defense before King Agrippa gives a much more detailed record of how faith played a role in Saul's conversion:
 - “And I said, who are you Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you and appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me”
 - How does the above verse express faith by the Apostle Paul?
2. In spite of all of the evil things that Paul had done; had he rejected the call by Christ it would have been the greatest crime of all. (I Corinthians 16:22)
3. Note that Paul's response was _____ and he clearly recognized Jesus as _____.
4. When Jesus says; “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting”, it must have caused Paul to be overwhelmed with grief.
 - Prior to this Saul/Paul was persecuting and killing Christians and now he discovers that Jesus is the true Messiah and that he was actually fighting against God.
 - Paul had seen the risen Lord and it forever changed his life

- Here is what Paul records in I Timothy 1:13-17; “even though I was **formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor**. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among who I am the foremost of all**. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would **believe in Him for eternal life**. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen”.
5. One of the greatest evidences of Paul’s faith was his willingness to _____ to Christ as Lord of his life. (Acts 9:6-8)
- In the same way; Abraham _____ to God when He told him to go to the Land of Promise.
 - “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1)
 - “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6)

A Transformed Life Evidenced By Prayer (Acts 9:10-12)

1. When we willingly submit to Jesus Christ as Lord; our perspective on life quickly changes and we move from trusting in ourselves to trusting in the Lord.
2. This is evidenced by Saul praying to the Lord for direction and healing. The answer came by way of a vision where a man named Ananias (probably a spiritual leader in the Damascus church) would come and lay hands on Saul so that he would regain his sight.

3. Here is what John MacArthur says; “Prayer is the spontaneous response of the believing heart to God. Those truly transformed by Jesus Christ find themselves lost in the wonder and joy of communion with Him. Prayer is as natural for the Christian as breathing. Paul became a man of unceasing prayer.” (John MacArthur; Commentary on Acts, page 271)
4. A story about the power of prayer as seen in the Jamaican church – see handout. (pages 544-545; One Year Book of Christian History)

A Transformed Life Evidenced By Obedience (Acts 9:13-19)

1. The obedience of Ananias
 - It is pretty clear that Ananias knew of Saul’s evil workings for Luke records; “But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name” (Acts 9:13)
 - What was the Lord’s response to what Ananias said?
 - How did Ananias show his obedience to the Lord?
2. The obedience of Paul
 - We know that the Holy Spirit was already at work in Paul’s life because he ceased from his murderous activities and willingly went to see Ananias.
 - We also see Paul’s obedience through prayer

- The Lord took a man who intended to bring harm to “the saints” and transformed his life:
 - 1) He used the _____ gifts that Saul already had and _____ them.
 - 2) He _____ those _____ qualities and gave him new passions and new pursuits.
 - 3) This is something that only God can do!
- 3. One of the key ways in which we know that we are Christians is our lives are _____ and that results in our _____ through service.
- 4. Another mark of a follower of Christ is the desire to be with other _____. (Acts 9:19, I John 3:14, Psalm 119:63)

A Transformed Life Evidenced By An Outward Witness (Acts 9:20-22)

1. Why did Paul preach in the synagogues?
2. Was there a delay in Paul’s obedience to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God?
3. Paul’s response to proclaim the “Good News” in such an immediate and passionate manner is evidence that his life was transformed. “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature, the old things are passed away; behold new things have come.” (II Corinthians 5:17)
4. What was the response of those who heard Saul?

A Transformed Life Evidenced By Suffering (Acts 9:23-30)

1. This is a rather ironic twist of events as Paul will now become the object of _____ as the Jews and the people of Damascus were out to arrest him.
2. A little background as to what is going on:
 - We are told that Saul (Paul) “kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 9:22)
 - Luke then says; “When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him.” (Acts 9:23)
 - 1) The length of this period of time is not revealed here in Acts 9:22-23, but if you read **Galatians** 1:17-18; we are told that Paul spent time in Nabatean Arabia (the area south of Damascus to the Sinai peninsula) and also returned at least one more time to Damascus.
 - 2) This period of time between Acts 9:22 and 9:23 is about 3 years. **Luke references it as** “and when many days had elapsed”, while **Paul tells us**; “then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas (Peter) and stayed with him for 15 days.” (Galatians 1:17-18)
 - 3) It is highly probable that Paul had worn out his welcome even among the Arab’s because the governor who reported to the King of Damascus (King Aretas); placed guards at the city gates to have Paul arrested. (II Corinthians 11:32-33)
 - Paul is now being sought out by the Jews and the Arabs of Damascus to be arrested for preaching the Gospel. He will escape with the assistance of his disciples and then head to Jerusalem.

3. Paul's visit to Jerusalem was short lived (perhaps just 15-20 days – Galatians 1:18) but here are some things that happened while he was there:
- He tried making contact with the local believers but they were afraid of him and unsure if his conversion was legitimate.
 - Barnabas will bring Paul before the Apostles and basically vouch for him that he is one of them.
 - 1) He affirms that Paul had seen the Lord on the road to Damascus thus believing his testimony and conversion.
 - 2) He also affirms his motives and actions as being consistent with those of a follower of Christ by describing how Paul spoke boldly about Jesus Christ.
 - He spent a good deal of time with Peter indicating Peter's affirmation of him being a follower of Christ.
 - Paul will preach, argue and debate the Hellenistic Jews to the point where he wears out his welcome.
 - Those Jews will attempt to kill Paul but are not successful
 - The church found themselves with a dilemma; was it better to have Paul against them or for them?
 - 1) The decision was made to take Paul to Caesarea and then finally sent him away to his home town of Tarsus.
 - 2) Paul will remain in Tarsus for approximately 2-3 years
 - 3) During the time he lived in Tarsus; it is believed that Paul was doing missionary work and possibly establishing churches in the region of Syria and Cilicia. (Galatians 1:21)

4. In spite of the persecution by the Jews and Arabs – Paul found himself growing in the knowledge and grace of the Lord.
 - It is believed that during those times in the Arabian Desert as well as his time in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Tarsus; that Paul was being molded and shaped by the Lord to be the Apostle to the Gentiles.
 - Paul used every opportunity to declare that Jesus Christ was Lord and we will witness this throughout our study in the Book of Acts.

Concluding Remarks:

1. With Paul gone – things quieted down for a season and here is how Luke described the status of the church; “So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase. (Acts 9:30)
2. Our attention will shift back to Peter who also had a very fruitful ministry
3. Paul’s name will resurface again in Acts 11 and then he will begin his missionary journeys starting in Acts 13.....so stay tuned!