

Lesson 8: Called by God

Acts 9:1-30

Jesus promises in John 10:27: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” In our reading today, Ananias will hear the Lord’s voice and immediately respond, “Here I am, Lord.” I pray that as we study His Word and listen for His voice, we will become as sensitive and responsive to the Lord as this early follower of Christ.

Take some time to read through all of Acts 9:1-30 before you begin your lesson.

The Road to Damascus

In Acts 9, Saul (whom we know better as Paul) set out from Jerusalem on what would have been about a six days’ journey to Damascus.

Read Acts 9:1-9.

1. Why was Saul going to Damascus?
2. Describe the scene of Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus as you imagine it from Luke’s description. If you have time, you may want to read Saul’s own accounts of this experience from his testimonies in Acts 22:1-11 and 26:9-18 to get an even fuller picture.
3. What did Jesus convict Saul of doing in Acts 9:4-5? From Luke 10:16, how was Saul doing that?
4. How do you think the Lord feels when you suffer or are persecuted? Read Psalm 37:1-7. What will the Lord do for you according to verse 6? How does this Psalm encourage you?

“Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, ‘Ananias.’ And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’”

Acts 9:10

5. What immediate effect did this experience have on Saul?

Saul wasn't the only man meeting with the Risen Lord Christ. Ananias (clearly a different Ananias than the one we met in Acts 5) was having his own experience further down the road in Damascus.

Read Acts 9:10-19.

6. How is Ananias described in Acts 9:10 and 22:12? How do you think there were already believers in Damascus?
7. When the Lord called Ananias' name in Acts 9:10, how did Ananias respond? After the Lord told Ananias to go and minister to Saul, what concerns did he voice in Acts 9:13-14?
8. After the Lord confirmed His will, what did Ananias do in Acts 9:17? Using his responses in verses 10 and 13-14 as a model, what do you think we should do when we believe the Lord is calling us to action?
9. What happened during Ananias and Saul's time together (Acts 9:17-19)?

Their interaction and Saul's restoration makes me think back to Peter's words in Acts 3:19: "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." Take a moment to sit with the Lord and enjoy the refreshment that comes in His presence!

All the Nations of the World

10. Looking to Acts 9:15-16, what was the Lord's specific calling on Saul's life?

On the heels of Philip's evangelism to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian, Saul's calling in Acts 9 is the first clear indication that the gospel would be extended to the Gentiles (non-Jews). The gospel was going forth! Saul, who is often called Paul, wrote the letter to the Ephesians later in his life, but it clearly reflects the Lord's purpose to minister to the Gentiles through Saul/Paul.

11. Read Paul's words in Ephesians 2:11-22.

- ❖ What was the situation of the Gentiles prior to Christ (2:11-12)?
- ❖ How did Jesus change things for the Gentiles (2:13, 2:19-22)?
- ❖ Who has access to God through Jesus Christ (2:14-18)?

12. What is the mystery that Paul spoke of in Ephesians 3:1-6?

Knowing the end before the beginning, it may be easy for us to overlook the enormity of the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan. To this point, though, the Gentiles had been "separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12).

13. While the inclusion of the Gentiles was a mystery to the people of Saul's time, it was not a new thought to the Lord. In fact, He had had the Gentiles in mind from the beginning.

- ❖ Read God's covenant with Abraham (Abram) as it is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. What does God promise to do through Abraham in Genesis 12:3?
- ❖ From Matthew 1:1, whose descendant was Jesus?
- ❖ How are all the nations of the world blessed through Jesus? (See John 3:16-17.)
- ❖ Putting it all together, how did God bless all the nations through Abraham?

14. How did Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 indicate His intention to include the Gentiles?

15. What does it mean to you personally that God chose to include the Gentiles in His plans?

A Changed Man

Return to Acts, and read 9:20-30.

16. What had Saul set out to the synagogues at Damascus to do (see Acts 9:2)? What did he actually do there according to Acts 9:20-21?

17. How has your life changed since you came to know Christ as your Lord and Savior?

18. How did Saul's life before his conversion affect his testimony in the synagogues of Damascus according to Acts 9:21-22?

19. What was Saul called to do after his conversion according to Acts 26:15-18?

20. Saul's life was not the only one with purpose. From Saul/Paul's words in Ephesians 2:8-10, how are we saved? What purpose does God have for our lives in Christ?

21. In Acts 9:23-25 and 9:29-30, we read of the beginning of Saul's persecution. Read Jesus' words in John 15:18-19. How were those words evidenced in Saul's life?

22. What do you think it means to be hated by the world? Read James 4:4 and Galatians 1:10. Give some examples of how we seek friendship with the world rather than friendship with the Lord. Ask God to bring to your attention any area of your life where you are seeking man's approval above God's.

This portion of Acts 9 ends with Saul setting off for his hometown of Tarsus, where he would live until Barnabas brought him back into the story of Acts (11:25). Saul/Paul does speak briefly of his time in Tarsus in his letter to the Galatians (1:21-2:1), but for the most part, these years are missing from the chronicle of Acts and from Saul/Paul's own writings. This time of Saul's life is

often referred to as his “silent years” because they are missing from our records,⁸ but we can be sure that those years were not wasted nor are they missing from God’s memory.

23. Have you had seasons of your life when you felt “out of the picture”? Looking back, how did God use those years?

Prepare for Life

Ananias ministered to Paul in Damascus. When Paul went to Jerusalem, it was Barnabas who took up for him and made space for him among the apostles. The Lord is certainly our Provider and is sufficient to meet all of our needs, but sometimes He does so through the tangible arms or mouths or feet of another believer.

24. How have you been strengthened, encouraged or ministered to by another believer in the past few months?

25. Ask the Lord if there is anyone in your life that He would like to minister to through you. How does He desire to use you in that person’s life?

⁸ Polhill, John B. *Acts. The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.

Lecture Notes: Lesson 8