

Saul's Conversion and Peter's Continuing Ministry

Passages: Acts 9:1–31; Acts 9:32–10:23; 2 Tim 2:20–22

Memory Verse

“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.”
(Acts 9:15)

Knowledge of God's Will [God's Word]	Knowledge of God [God's Divine Nature]	Good Work [Behavior]
God establishes our plans and allows them to come to fruition.	God is sovereign over all of life's circumstances.	1. Trust and obey. 2. Imitate Christ to prepare ourselves to become chosen vessels of God.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Saul's Conversion (Acts 9:1–31)
 - 1. A Spiritual Blindness
 - 2. A Chosen Vessel
- B. Peter's Continuing Ministry (Acts 9:32–10:23)
 - 1. A Spiritual Healing
 - 2. A Spiritual Revelation

Life Application

- 1. Trust and Obey
- 2. Become a Chosen Vessel

Memory Verse

Conclusion: God has true dominion over our lives. We must learn to trust and obey.

Introduction

When we think about where we want to go in life, we often try to envision what our life may look like in the near or far future. We may plan short and long-term goals to see the bigger picture of what we need to do to achieve the life that we want for ourselves. However, if we ask ourselves what our life may look like in a few years, none of us can be certain of anything other than what we see now. Only God knows what lies ahead, and only He knows the plans that He has prepared for us.

A. Saul's Conversion (Acts 9:1–31)

A Roman citizen from a devout Jewish family in the city of Tarsus, Saul was a well-educated Pharisee who had concrete knowledge of the Law. But none of this could have prepared him for his encounter with the Lord. The story of how Saul met the Lord Jesus is recorded multiple times throughout the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 9:3–19; 22:6–16; 26:9–23). The many detailed accounts of this event show how important and meaningful it was for Saul. It was a personal testimony of a major turning point in his life and faith.

1. A Spiritual Blindness

Let's read Acts 9:1–9 and see what happened during this encounter.

What would you do if you lost your sense of sight? Would you panic? Would you feel comfortable enough to take even one step? When the light shone down from heaven, Saul immediately fell to the ground. Can you imagine the shock from meeting the Lord? It was during this time that he began to realize his own spiritual blindness. The Lord called him, asking, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). Having been blinded by the light, he had a sudden realization and asked, "Who are You, Lord?" (Acts 9:5).

Up until this point, Saul's confidence and self-assurance in his knowledge of the Law led to his resolve to persecute Christians. His question, "Who are You, Lord?", shows his new and sudden uncertainty as he began to see how foolish he was. It was as though someone had pulled the rug out from under him. Although Saul was full of knowledge of the Law, he did not truly know the Lord. The Lord had been a stranger to him all this time.

The Lord replied to Saul, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5). To "kick against the goads" was a common expression that originated from farmers. A goad was a long wooden stick with a point at one end, a traditional tool that farmers used to guide or herd livestock, such as stubborn oxen. The more a stubborn ox did not budge, the more the farmer would use the goad to budge the ox. Occasionally, the ox would kick at the goad, but by making contact with its pointed end, the ox would inflict even greater pain on itself with the force of its kick.

The Lord used this saying to teach Saul about himself. Although it seemed as though this was a first encounter, the Lord had actually been goading Saul for quite some time now! As a Pharisee, Saul persecuted believers in the name of the Law, thinking that he was doing what the Lord wanted. However, he was unknowingly resisting the Lord, and in doing so, Saul was constantly "kicking against the goads" to his own detriment.

With physical blindness came insight into his spiritual blindness; Saul now understood that he was mistaken. He became fully aware of the Lord's sovereignty and fell to the ground in reverent fear

and submission to the Lord's will. He no longer had confidence in himself but began to recognize the Lord Jesus as his true Lord and Savior. He wanted to make things right. So, he asked, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6). Instead of relying on his own knowledge as before, he now sought to follow God's lead. He learned to rely on the Lord to help him move in the right direction.

By God's grace, many of us are able to receive a proper education and pursue our chosen career. But as a result, we often become driven by our ambitions and make decisions based on what we think we need to do to succeed in our goals. We become focused on our own priorities and become ignorant of how our actions affect our spirituality. Such ignorance makes us spiritually blind, and we become like Saul kicking against the goads.

The Bible tells us, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov 9:10). When we no longer fear the Lord and are no longer sensitive to the teachings of the Bible, we forget about God's sovereignty over us. This leads to ignorance of our own spirituality and, in turn, to spiritual blindness. Therefore, to avoid spiritual blindness, we must not lose sight of what is truly important in our life: moving towards the kingdom of heaven according to God's guidance.

2. A Chosen Vessel

Let's continue reading Acts 9:10–31.

Ananias' initial fears regarding Saul were understandable; Saul was well known for his persecution of the believers. He had thrown many believers and disciples in jail, and now he had the authority to imprison even more. How could such a man be trusted? However, the Lord reassured Ananias, and despite his own fears, Ananias trusted the Lord and obeyed His instructions. With a steadfast faith in the Lord, he went to receive Saul. When Ananias entered the house that Saul was staying in, he laid his hands on Saul and even called him, "Brother Saul" (Acts 9:17).

How many of us are able to call our enemies our brothers? Most believers would have feared to even lay a finger on a person like Saul, expecting to end up in prison, but Ananias obeyed God's instructions. He submitted to the Lord's directions, and as a result, Saul's sight was restored, and his strength renewed. Because of Ananias, Saul was able to be baptized and become a chosen vessel for God's work.

It is easy for us to think like Ananias and judge Saul for his past actions. However, Ananias' submission allowed God to use him to raise up another of God's chosen vessels. The Bible tells us that God has chosen the "foolish" and the "weak" so that no one can boast of their own accomplishments, but rather glorify God (1 Cor 1:26–31; Jer 9:24). Unlike man, God does not look at our outer appearances, our credentials, our worldly accomplishments, or our resume to determine whether we should be chosen as His workers. Rather, God looks at the heart and uses His infinite wisdom and insight to see the future potential of a worker. In Saul's case, his zeal for persecuting the disciples was transformed into a zeal towards preaching the gospel and furthering God's work instead.

Another key step of Saul's transformation was his repentance. Saul humbled himself to the point that he named himself the chief of sinners, even long after his conversion (1 Tim 1:15). After accepting baptism, he was no longer darkened by his past understanding or bound by his past sins.

Saul found a new nature in Christ and began preaching boldly in the name of Jesus Christ. Saul's dramatic transformation is an encouragement for us. We too are chosen vessels, so we must be renewed in the Spirit by putting on the new man according to God's righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:17–24; 1 Cor 11:1; Col 3:10; Rom 12:2).

B. Peter's Continuing Ministry (Acts 9:32–10:23)

1. A Spiritual Healing

Peter's experience with the Lord Jesus was vastly different from Saul's. Peter was with the Lord Jesus while He still walked the earth, and he personally learned from Jesus' teachings. After the Lord's death and following the many events that helped shape his faith, Peter became an abundantly useful vessel of God. He began preaching throughout all parts of the region, bearing witness to what he saw and heard.

Let's read about Peter's continuing ministry in Acts 9:32–43.

While passing through Lydda, Peter came across a man named Aeneas. Aeneas had been paralyzed for eight years, helpless and bedridden. When Peter passed through, he performed a miracle of healing and called upon the power of God to heal Aeneas. Peter deliberately says to Aeneas, "Jesus the Christ heals you," because he understood that he was just a vessel, useful for the Lord's purpose and good will (Acts 9:34). In this instance, Peter was fully aware that the Lord Jesus was his sovereign Lord, and that only He could grant the power to heal and change people's lives. As a result, many who witnessed the miracle turned to the Lord. Aeneas was healed physically, but the witnesses were healed spiritually.

Peter was then called over to Joppa to help a woman named Tabitha, also known as Dorcas. Dorcas had fallen sick and passed away, but those who loved her and were with her sent for Peter's help. When Peter arrived, the widows who mourned for Dorcas showed Peter the garments that she had made. Garments often represent our deeds, and Dorcas was certainly a woman of good reputation, as the Bible describes her as a disciple "full of good works and charitable deeds" (Acts 9:36).

Some people question why we cannot simply do good deeds to go to heaven, while others question why faith alone is not enough to go to heaven. Dorcas shows us that faith and good deeds go hand in hand. She shone the light of the gospel for Christ through her good deeds, and others were able to see her Christ-like character. When we grow in faith in the Lord, we experience an inward transformation by the Spirit that is reflected outwardly. Our speech and our actions become noticeably different, and those around us can see that change.

Miraculously, after Peter prayed, he said, "Tabitha, arise," and she opened her eyes and sat up (Acts 9:40). Once again, many came to believe in the Lord (Acts 9:42).

Like Aeneas' paralysis and Dorcas' death, it can be difficult for humans to understand why God allows certain things to happen. We know that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, but we still demand reasons for circumstances that we cannot accept or are beyond our control. The Bible tells us that God's understanding is above our understanding (Isa 55:8–9). It is impossible for us to understand God's plans because we, unlike God, are not all-knowing or all-powerful.

We need to recognize that only God has full control over all and learn to trust that He has our best interests in mind. Aeneas was bedridden for eight years, and Dorcas suffered an illness that led to

her death. But in both cases, the outcome of the miracles performed by Peter was not only a physical healing, but also a spiritual healing for those who witnessed them. As much as we try to plan for the future, only He can direct and allow events to unfold. Like Peter, Aeneas, and Dorcas, we are all just a small part of God's plan, and whatever out-of-control circumstances that may occur, we need to trust that God is guiding us.

2. A Spiritual Revelation

Although Peter had a great understanding of the truth, there was still more for him to see and learn from the Lord Jesus.

Let us continue reading Acts 10:1–23 about how God allowed Peter to see a vision.

Up until this point, Peter preached primarily to the Jews because it was unlawful for Jews to intermingle with people of other nations. Through the vision, God revealed to Peter a great mystery, and he pondered upon its meaning. When he was told of Cornelius the centurion, and how Cornelius wanted to meet him, all the pieces started coming together. He realized that the gospel was not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles (Acts 10:34). What a revelation! This was the great mystery that Saul (later called Paul) also came to understand and write about (Eph 3).

Oftentimes, we stay in our comfort zone because that is all we can see and understand, but God always finds ways to show us a greater scope than what we first imagined. Had Peter been narrow-minded, he may have missed out on this opportunity to preach the gospel further and shine the light for Christ. Seeing how vehemently Peter refused to eat the unclean animals in the vision, Peter must have been astonished to learn that God planned salvation for not just the Jews, but also for the Gentiles and for anyone who believes. This opened the horizon to greater possibilities, and Peter continued to grow in his faith.

Check for Understanding

- 1. What is the significance of each of Saul's questions to the Lord?**
 - a. Who are You, Lord? – He recognized Jesus as his true Lord and Savior
 - b. Lord, what do You want me to do? – He submitted to the Lord's sovereignty with reverence
- 2. How did Ananias react to the Lord's instructions regarding Saul?** He was doubtful and hesitant to follow the Lord's instruction to meet Saul. However, he trusted in God and obeyed.
- 3. Who was Dorcas? What can we learn from her lifestyle?** She was a disciple of the Lord; a woman full of good works and charitable deeds. Although she fell ill and died, she was raised back to life. Dorcas shows us that faith and good deeds go hand in hand.
- 4. What did Peter see in the vision?** He saw an object like a large bound sheet descending from heaven containing all kinds of unclean animals, and a voice commanded him to kill and eat them. After his initial refusal, the voice told him, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."
- 5. What was the revelation behind Peter's vision?** Salvation is not just for the Jews, but also the Gentiles and all who believe.

Life Application

1. Trust and Obey

If we put ourselves in Saul's position, we may find that we are actually a lot like him. We spend our time trying to be as strong, intelligent, and versatile as we can. We go to school, try to ace our exams, aim for a reputable university, and eventually seek a good job that sustains our lifestyle. However, as we set out to

fulfill what we judge is best for ourselves, we will experience times of disappointment. Despite our best efforts, there are limitations to our abilities. Saul, later known as Paul, states that he'd rather boast about his infirmities because it is in his weakness that God's strength is seen clearly (2 Cor 12:9). When we are at a low point, we realize how much we need God in our life. It is during those times that we need to remember: we have a supreme God who takes care of us and watches over us.

It is one thing to know that God is all-powerful, but our actions and speech show whether we truly believe in our hearts that all is within God's control. When we come to know the true and living God, we must learn to trust and obey Him. This means accepting that God knows what is best. Just as we learn to trust that our parents know what's best for us, how much more then should we learn to trust and obey the absolute commandment and judgment from God? If we trust in God's sovereignty, then we will naturally obey His commands, just as Saul and Ananias did.

2. Become a Chosen Vessel

How do we become vessels who can serve God? 2 Timothy 2:20–21 tells us, "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work."

We were all created differently according to God's plans, and He has given each of us a different purpose and use. However, we must prepare ourselves so that we can be ready to serve our Lord. Just as how Saul and Peter's experiences in serving the Lord were different, we each have our own specific uses for the Lord. But first we must cleanse ourselves of all filth because a dirty vessel cannot be used. To become faithful servants of God that are useful for all works, we need to walk worthy of the Lord's calling (Eph 4:1) and imitate Christ (1 Cor 11:1). We can imitate Christ by studying and understanding the word of God.

The word of God is the light that shines on our path and lights our way. The more we walk in the light, the more God can show us our weaknesses and what we should do (Ps 119:105). In this light, we can also see our strengths and the gifts God has given us so that we can use them in the right way. We can use it to illuminate our flaws and learn how we can become more like Christ. Just as how Saul had time to ponder upon himself while he was blind, we also need to take time to reflect upon ourselves. How do our actions and speech affect us? How do they affect those around us? Do they glorify God? Are we good representations of our Lord? If we know what we can improve on, then we can look towards Christ as an example and imitate the virtues that we lack.

Discussion

- What virtues of Christ do you need to cultivate more in your daily life?
- What steps can you take towards learning to trust and obey God?
- In what ways can you be a useful vessel for God?

Memory Verse

"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."
(Acts 9:15)

Meaning

We are all chosen vessels of God. He chose us because He loves us. We were created in His image and therefore, as His children, we are a representation of Him to the world. We are no longer of ourselves, but

of God. Having understood the loving sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, we must learn to imitate Christ and live a life worthy of His salvation so that our actions may bring others to know Him.

Conclusion

Saul turned his life towards a completely different direction. Peter's ministry continued to reveal groundbreaking changes and realizations. Neither of these two could have guessed that these events would happen to them. Yet, God allowed it all to happen for the purpose of the gospel. God's omnipotence allows everything to happen under His control. No matter how we may struggle against or without Him, we will soon realize that we are helpless without His direction. We must not doubt the Lord's love nor His good intent for us.

When we stand amazed at the works of the Lord in our life, we understand who is truly in control of our lives. We learn to let go of our selfish and stubborn ways, and we learn what it means to truly know and serve our sovereign Lord. As His vessels we must trust and obey Him, and submit ourselves to be led by His Spirit. In doing so, we can let the word of God spiritually transform our hearts, our deeds, and our lives as chosen vessels in ways that we may have never imagined.

Lesson 4 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What does it mean to be a chosen vessel of God?
It means that God has chosen us because He loves us. As His children, we represent Him to the world and are no longer of ourselves, but of God.
2. What does it mean to be spiritually blind?
It means relying on our own knowledge and being driven by our own ambitions and priorities instead of following God. When we are spiritually blind, we are ignorant of how our actions affect our spirituality. We no longer fear God or are insensitive to the Bible's teachings.
3. What was Ananias' initial reaction to God's command? How did he act after God's response?
He doubted Saul's intentions and feared approaching him. After God's response, however, Ananias immediately went to carry out His command, and even called Saul "brother."
4. How did God use Aeneas' and Dorcas' illnesses to further His purpose? What can we learn from these events about the circumstances that we might experience?
The miracles of their healing spread the gospel further among witnesses. We can learn that we are all a part of God's plan, and that since God's understanding is above our own, we ought to trust that whatever happens, He is in control and knows what is best for us.
5. Do you think your actions show that you truly trust in the Lord? Why or why not?
Personal answers.
6. How do you think you can serve God? How can you prepare yourself to be a chosen vessel for Him?
Personal answers.