

## **Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem and Peter in Lydda and Joppa. Acts 9: 19-43**

### **He said 'What'? Acts 9: 19-25. (Mike)**

After his conversion and healing experience, Saul spends several days with the disciples in Damascus. He is strengthened first with some food and then with his interaction with the disciples.

It's likely that Ananias is one of the disciples talking with Saul. Saul already knew a lot about the scriptures, he didn't need a whole series of studies on however many fundamentals they had back then. What he needed was the power of God to open his eyes to the gospel. God already did that in dramatic fashion.

- What were the disciples talking to Saul about in those few days?

Then it says immediately he begins to proclaim Jesus saying "He is the Son of God."

- It doesn't seem like much time between his conversion and powerfully preaching for Jesus – why is this?

Last week Catherine's Indigenous translation of Acts talked about Saul being a "man who questions." It implies that he was not only questioning people to find out where the Christians are but that maybe he is also questioning God about who Jesus is too. Perhaps this had some bearing on his dramatic conversion as well.

- If you were one of the Jews in Damascus, what would you think of Saul's turnaround?

### **Escape. Acts 9: 23-25.**

Seems like the 'same old same old', though, when the Jews plot to kill Saul (verse 23).

- How do you think Saul got to hear about their plot to kill him?

I'm guessing that Saul, having been a leader in tracking down and having Christians put to death, knew what their game was.

- What do you think of Saul's dramatic escape?

### **We love you Saul, but... Acts 9: 26 -31 (Steve)**

Coming to Jerusalem was not a triumphal experience for Saul. The disciples were still extremely wary of Saul and no doubt Saul realises how much work he still needed to do to overcome the past.

- Who steps in on Saul's behalf and why?
- What do you think of Barnabus' actions? Maybe compare them to Ananias.
- What is the result of this interaction?

Now that Saul has been properly introduced, Barnabus is on his side and he has shown he is changed by going in and out among the disciples. Of course, things don't go smoothly. Saul speaks boldly. He argues with the Hellenistic Jews – who were still trying to kill him. So the church had to rescue him again (there seems to be a theme here). They send him down to Ceasarea (on the coast of the

Mediterranean) and then off to Tarsus (where he came from). Then verse 31 says there was a time of peace and growth for the church.

- Why is this? Is Saul a disruptive presence? (Maybe in both a bad and good way)

Saul first incites and commits persecution and then with his bold preaching he is the target of persecution.

- How did Saul's bold preaching add to the church?
- What do you think Saul learned from all of this?
- What did the Apostles/disciples learn from all of this?
- What can we learn? (see vs 30 – note that it talks about brothers and sisters making decisions here.)

### **Healings and miracles. Acts 9: 32-35**

While Saul has been in Jerusalem delivering a mighty witness, as well as causing a certain level of chaos, Peter is travelling about. Peter was going here and there among all the brothers and sisters (noting here again that it's inclusive of men and women) doing healings and miracles in this section of Acts. Verse 34 says that in Lydda Peter finds a man named Aenus who had been paralysed for eight years.

- Do you think Peter went looking for someone to heal (Peter finds a man) or was this a coincidence – was he just passing by.
- What do you think of the results of this healing?
- What do you think of Peter's command to get up and make his bed? Do we need a command to do something to aid healing? Contrast with Jesus.
- Sometimes well-meaning people corner people with disabilities and insist on praying for and healing them (usually with no more result than making the person with a disability annoyed or taking up their time). Compare this to what Peter is doing.

### **The Gazelle Rises. Acts 9: 36-43 (Catherine)**

Joppa is a little north west of Lydda on the Mediterranean coastline. I found conflicting distances from 6-12 miles/24-27kms. A 24 minute drive according to what I read but I don't know what that is at walking speed.

Tabitha/Dorcas (name means gazelle) is a much loved disciple and is described as "devoted to good works and acts of charity." She is prepared for burial but not yet buried. Having heard that Peter was in Lydda (probably have heard the story of Peter healing the paralyzed man) they ask him to come quickly. Given that Tabitha would likely be buried the next day it was important that Peter get there quickly.

- Comment on Tabitha/Dorcas importance, given that they sent for Peter when she died.
- What do you think they were hoping Peter might do? Peter had healed living people but raising from the dead was a different matter.

When he gets there, he finds a sad scene. It's obvious to him (and us) the kind of person Tabitha/Dorcas was.

- What's the importance of pointing out Tabitha's good works?

There are a number of similarities between Tabitha/Dorcas being brought back to life and the story of Jesus bringing Jairus daughter back to life (Mark 5:21-24; Luke 8:49-56).

- the use of messengers to call the person who will raise the dead,
  - the milling about of crying bystanders,
  - the excluding of outsiders from the room,
  - the call to the dead person to rise,
  - the taking of the revived individual by the hand.
- Comment on the different steps, particularly Peter's command "Tabitha get up (verse 40)."

### **Final thoughts/discussion**

- What do we think of the differences between Paul's work for the Kingdom and Peter's work. Had Peter stopped preaching and just devoted himself to performing miracles or is this just Luke's habit of skimming through the details to focus on what seems important to him?
- Are there any similarities or differences between Peter's early experience of preaching in Jerusalem and Paul's early efforts at preaching?
- Does powerful preaching always bring a certain level of chaos?
- What effect did the miracles Peter performed have on the church as a whole?
- What might be the purpose of all of these different efforts by Peter and Paul to spread the gospel?