

The
ACTS
of the Apostles



WHEN WE ENCOUNTER
GOD, OUR LIVES ARE
CHANGED
DRAMATICALLY FOR
HIS PURPOSES

ACTS 9:1-31

INTRODUCTION

- Saul, persecutor of the church, encounters God in a miraculous way that reverses the course of his life.
- Saul's calling and transformation, all the way down to his new name, is a great surprise to everyone around him, both Christian and Jew, which produces dramatic results.
- We see how God breaks into our lives in unexpected ways to accomplish His purposes for our good and His glory.

**GOD PREPARES
UNEXPECTED PEOPLE
FOR SURPRISING
MISSIONS**

ACTS 9:1-19

SAUL - DAMASCUS

- In an earlier study, we read of a young man named Saul who witnessed the killing of Stephen and then embarked on a personal vendetta of persecution against the early church (Acts 7:58; 8:1–3).
- Saul was relentlessly seeking out Jewish believers all the way to Syria so he can bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. Luke describes him as “breathing out murderous threats.”

SAUL - DAMASCUS

- In verse 3, Saul is traveling to Damascus when he suddenly encounters a brilliant light flashing like lightning. Stunned, Saul falls to the ground.
- In a dramatic moment that recalls many of Israel's encounters with God, an unseen voice speaks to Saul in a direct and knowing manner (verse 4).
- The voice belongs to the risen Jesus, the very person Saul has dedicated his life to protesting.

SAUL - DAMASCUS

- Jesus reveals himself as the object of Saul's persecution (verse 5).
- It was not just the church members whose lives he was ravaging, but Saul was directing his hatred and violence at Jesus Himself.
- The voice then sends Saul on his way to Damascus but reverses the purpose of his visit, telling him to expect further instructions when he arrives (verse 6).

SAUL - DAMASCUS

- In verses 7–9, we see that this experience leaves Saul rattled and his companions speechless.
- Saul is physically affected as well, suffering from loss of sight and appetite for three days after the encounter.
- Saul's hateful mission is now under divine control.

ANANIAS

- Luke's narrative moves to God's divine intervention in the life of a Christian named Ananias (verse 10).
- God comes to him in a vision and calls him by name, just as He did with Saul. In verses 11–12, Luke records God's plan for Ananias to meet Saul.
- Not all of us may experience God in the same dramatic way that Saul and Ananias did, but His power to orchestrate the events of our lives to bring us to salvation is no different today than it was then.

ANANIAS

- Ananias is shocked at the mission God has given him. All the surrounding regions are familiar with Saul and his mission to tear down the Church.
- In one sense, Ananias' hesitation is validated by the potential danger he may encounter by meeting with Saul.
- But God's ways are higher than Ananias' ways and He clearly has a plan regarding this infamous enemy of Christianity.

ANANIAS

- God restates His command in verses 15–16, sending Ananias with a direct order (“Go!”) and a gracious revelation of His surprising purpose.
- Saul, who has shown nothing but rejection of Christ, is destined to become one of His most effective Gospel witnesses across the Mediterranean and Asia Minor.
- Saul is “called to a holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9).

ANANIAS

- Ananias obeys the Lord's instructions and delivers His message to Saul (verse 17).
- As he prays over him, Saul immediately regains his sight. Luke describes the effect in verse 18 as "something like scales falling from his eyes."
- Right away, Saul gets up and is baptized, a profession of faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ.

ANANIAS

- He begins to eat again, on the road to recovery from the encounter and subsequent shock (verse 19).
- This supernatural event and Saul's response confirm God's surprising declaration that He has called and saved him for a purpose.

**GOD BRINGS
UNEXPECTED RESULTS
OUT OF OUR SURPRISE
ENCOUNTERS WITH
HIM**

ACTS 9:20-31

SAUL

- Saul undergoes mentoring and training from the other Christians in the city.
- He quickly progressed to preaching the Gospel in the local synagogues as a fulfillment of his divine commission (verse 19).
- Luke records Saul's adamant declaration that Jesus "is the Son of God" (verse 20).

SAUL

- To anyone who knew Saul the persecutor, this kind of evangelism comes as a complete surprise.
- Everyone in attendance begins talking among themselves, questioning whether this is the same person who had persecuted Christians (verse 21).
- They are astonished at the great reversal that has occurred. Saul continues to be unstoppable in the mission that God has called him to, growing more effective in his preaching Jesus.

SAUL

- Saul, renamed Paul, will later describe himself as having been a zealous scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures with impressive credentials, studying with the top rabbinical teachers of his time.
- God takes all his knowledge and transforms Saul's training into supernatural wisdom that pours out page after page in his Spirit-breathed epistles to churches and church leaders included in the New Testament today.

SAUL

- Isn't it amazing to see how God was building toward His plan all along?
- Saul thought he was plotting his own career and his own mission against the Church.
- God had greater, surprising plans to make Saul an anointed minister of the Gospel.

PLOT TO KILL SAUL

- The Jews' disbelief quickly turns to plots of violence against Saul (verses 23–24).
- This mirrors the common response of crowds and religious leaders who rejected Jesus' preaching.
- By this time, Saul has gathered his own disciples, who come to his aid with a daring late-night rescue mission (verse 25).

PLOT TO KILL SAUL

- Saul eventually returns to Jerusalem, where he tries to join in fellowship with the other Christians in the city.
- In verse 26, Luke records their reasonable response of doubt and fear, suspicious that their former persecutor has actually had a change in heart.
- It is not just the Jews who have a hard time believing the spiritual reversal in Saul's life.

PLOT TO KILL SAUL

- The early church also has trouble understanding how God could call someone so hateful and violent and use him as a witness for the Gospel.
- But in verse 27, one disciple, Barnabas, steps out in faith and confirms Saul's new mission
- Saul joins the missionary efforts of the Jerusalem church, preaching unashamedly in public and debating the Greek-speaking Jews (verses 28–29).

PLOT TO KILL SAUL

- We see in verse 29 that the Jews have the same response to Saul as they did to the other apostles (Acts 5) and Stephen (Acts 6–7).
- His former ties to the Jewish religious society count as nothing now that Saul is living for Christ.
- Saul will go on to write in one of his epistles that he “counts everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8).

PLOT TO KILL SAUL

- The work God began in Saul's heart has already begun to overflow into his life as he forsakes his old agenda and takes up God's mission instead.
- In verse 30, Paul leaves for Tarsus with the help of the other believers.

THE CHURCH

- Luke concludes this portion of Acts with the discerning observation that, in all the regions where persecution scattered the Christians, God's people are now growing in number.
- Jesus' commission for the disciples to be His Gospel witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:19) is now being fulfilled through the most surprising sequence of events.

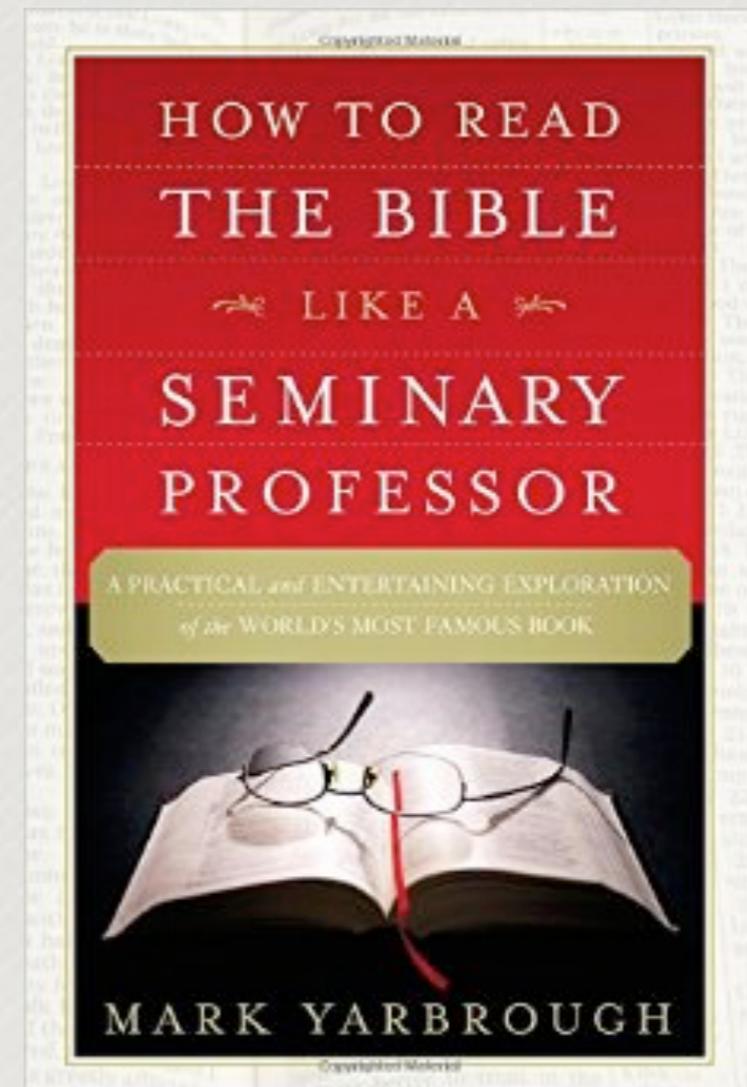
THE CHURCH

- God took Stephen's murder, Saul's violence, an unexpected encounter with Ananias, and the faith of Barnabas to accomplish His plan and extend His offer of salvation to the world.
- Luke specifically ends by mentioning the presence of the Holy Spirit, confirming once again the promise Jesus gave in Acts 1:8.

Biblical Interpretation

Biblical Interpretation

- Step One: Know It
 - Old Testament (5-12-5-5-12)
 - New Testament (4-1-21-1)
- Step Two: Work It
- Step Three: Live It



Biblical Interpretation

- Observation - words and phrases in the Bible.
- Reading - Bible has more than 1,100 chapters.
- Interpretation - understand the parameters of each type of literature in the Bible.
- History and culture - ancient Near East is different.
- Literature - various types of literature.

Assumptions of Interpretation

Inspiration - Translation

- We begin with assumption of the inspiration, transmission and translation of the Bible.
 - 2 Timothy 3:16 - Bible is God-breathed
 - 2 Peter 1:21 - men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit
 - Acts 4:25 - you spoke by the Holy Spirit

No Contradictions

- God's revelation will not have contradictions.
- If we find apparent contradictions, we should find reasonable answers for them:
 - Different accounts not contradictory (Judas)
 - Misunderstanding biblical languages (Moses)

No Contradictions

- In the Latin Vulgate, Jerome mistranslated the Hebrew term that we now know means “ray of light” as “horn.”
- Michelangelo therefore chiseled horns on his sculpture of Moses.
- This was a translation problem.



Common Sense

- Helpful principle: “When the literal sense makes good sense, seek no other sense lest it result in nonsense.”
- The Bible obviously uses various figures of speech.
- Jesus told parables and used metaphors (He is the vine, the door, and the light of the world).

Common Sense

- Second principle: “When the literal sense does not make good sense, we should seek some other sense lest it lead to nonsense.”
- We should reject a literal sense when it contradicts the moral law, physical law, or supernatural law.

Common Sense

- When Jesus says in Matthew 5:30 to cut off your hand, it violates moral law.
- When Jesus talks about those who swallow a camel in Matthew 23:24, that violates a physical law.
- When we read in Jonah 3:10 that God repented or changed His mind, we know that violates a supernatural law (Numbers 23:19).

Rules of Biblical Interpretation

Rule of Definition

- What does the word mean?
- Define your terms and then keep to the terms you have defined.
- Using a Hebrew/English or Greek/English lexicon will help you understand nuances.

Rule of Usage

- The OT was written for the Jews, so the words and idioms must have been intelligible to them. We should interpret them that way.
- The NT was written in a Greco-Roman culture, and we should interpret the words and phrases according to the standard usage of that period in time.

Rule of Context

- The meaning must be gathered from the context.
- “Jesus is Lord, and context is king.”
- “A verse taken out of context is a pretext for a proof-text.”
- 1 Peter 3:18 - not about universal salvation
- 1 Corinthians 8:5 - does not teach we are gods

Rule of Background

- We should have some awareness of the life and society of the times in which the Scriptures were written.
- The spiritual principles are timeless, yet they are conveyed within a culture and society that we need to understand in order to fully understand the spiritual principles.

Rule of Logic

- Interpretation involves logical reasoning.
- The Bible is to be interpreted as we would any other volume of literature.
- We should use logic (and common sense) to weed out improper interpretations.
- Unbiblical interpretations are usually a violation of logic and evidence.

Rule of Precedent

- We should not violate the known usage of a word and invent another if there is no precedent for doing so.
- An interpreter is like a judge who is to use precedent to judge a case.
- Acts 17 - Bereans examined the Scriptures to determine if what Paul taught was true.

Rule of Unity

- The parts of Scripture must be interpreted with reference to the whole.
- An interpretation must be consistent with the rest of Scripture.
- Scripture interprets Scripture - the Bible's self-interpretation provides clues.

Resource

