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NEW ZEALAND BIBLE CLASSES

PREACHING THE RISEN CHRIST

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Study #4: The conversion of Saul

Reading: Acts 9:1-18

Thank you brother chairman, my dear brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, and my dear young people.

Well tonight then, we start Acts 9, and you'll notice how abrupt a change it is, as we move from the story of Acts 8 into Acts 9; Luke tells us in Acts 8 verse 40 that 'Philip was found at Azotus, and passing through he preached in all the cities until he came to Caesarea; and Saul yet breathing out (or 'in' as our chairman probably rightly read) 'threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest'. So the scene of Acts 9 now swiftly changes back to the life and the story of Saul. Now where has it gone back to? and the answer is, it's probably taken us back, hasn't it? to Acts 8 and verse 3. So when it says there, 'As for Saul, he made havoc of the ecclesia, entering into every house and haling men and women committed them to prison (chapter 9 verse 1) 'And Saul yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter'. So everything between those two verses, has been as it were, a special section in the middle; everything between Acts 8 verse 3 and chapter 9 verse 1, has been this extra bit in the middle; and what was all that about? Well it was about the work of Philip the evangelist, was it not? and the taking of the truth to Samaria. But now that that story has concluded and the work of Philip has ended, as it were, we now find that the record goes back to where Luke had left off in Acts 8 verse 3, in commenting on the furious assault of Saul upon the ecclesia

So we're told here in Acts 9 verse 1, 'He was yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter' and I guess the word '**yet**', gives us that connection back to chapter 8 verse 3, that that spirit of persecution that he was showing is still there, his antagonism to the truth and to the disciples is still there. In fact, so strong is his hatred against the disciples that verse 1 tells us, 'that he went unto the high priest and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem'. He went unto the high priest, verse 1, now the high priest in verse 1 is still cunning old Caiaphas, because Caiaphas was appointed as high priest in AD 18 and he held office until AD 36, in fact, he was probably the longest high priest in this particular era of time. So the man who was responsible for putting to death the Lord Jesus Christ, **is still** the high priest at this particular time, and it was to him, we believe, that Saul went on this

occasion, that he might desire of him, letters to the synagogues.

Now what we're told of here in verse 2, is that the synagogue's system were counted in the Roman world as having responsibility over the Jewish people. So even though Damascus was beyond the realm or the province of Judea, in fact, Damascus was counted as part of the area known as Decapolis, the fact was, that even in those far flung provinces, the synagogue system was allowed to hold authority for the treatment of the Jewish people. The Roman power would allow the local synagogues to hold responsibility for the treatment of the Jews, and the synagogues themselves, if they couldn't make a decision in a matter, would automatically refer to the authority of the temple back in Jerusalem, and of course, to the power of the Sanhedrin. So we believe, that when the apostle Paul, as he later is to be called, when he desired these letters from Caiaphas in verse 2, we know that, in fact, from the words of Ananias in verse 14, that the letters of authority that Saul had, actually came not just from Caiaphas, but from the chief priests as a whole, they carried with them the authority of the Sanhedrin, the priestly leaders and therefore, the synagogues, even in Damascus, would defer to those letters of authority.

Do you know what the apostle was trying to do, by the way? I shouldn't really say that he was the apostle, should I? because he isn't quite the apostle yet, he will be later on in this chapter, but we're too early to say he's the apostle. What do you think Saul was trying to do here? and I think the answer is, that he was trying to outflank the spreading of the truth, because what happened in chapter 8 verse 3, is that he knows that because he had tried to stamp out the truth in Jerusalem, and taking men and women to prison in Acts 8 verse 3, that the result was, verse 4, they were scattered abroad! Now where were they scattered abroad to? and the answer is and the rest of chapter 8 is going to tell us, that the truth scattered as a result of Saul's endeavours to stamp it out, it scattered to Samaria. It scattered throughout Samaria and the rest of chapter 8 is going to tell us about the truth having gone into the region of Samaria. I think that what Saul was trying to do on this occasion by going to Damascus in chapter 9 verse 1, was to outflank the spread of the truth, to get around the head of it, over the top of it, so that he could stop it as it travelled north. If he could get to Damascus and put the fear of power of the priests, into the Jewish people in Damascus (of whom there were, by the way, not a few) because Josephus tells us that over 10,000 Jews died in that area, in the Jewish wars. So there was a great Jewish population in Damascus, and if he could outflank the truth as it spread through Samaria, by racing to the north and get around over the top of the spread of the truth, he might be able to put a stop to it! I think that's what he wanted to do!

So what he did was, he travelled to Damascus which was a 100 miles to the north of Samaria, he travelled a 100 miles north to try and outflank the spread of the truth. Do you know what's really funny about that? the truth was already ahead of him! Because if you come to chapter 11 and verse 19, we're told there, here's Saul trying to outflank the truth by travelling a 100 miles north, north of where it was then known to be, Samaria, and in Acts 11 verse 19 it says, 'Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus and

Antioch'. Do you know where Antioch is, b&s? why, **it's a 100 miles north of Damascus**. As far as Saul travelled northwards to try and outflank the truth, the truth and the bearers of that truth and that message, were already a 100 miles north again; they were already ahead of him. There was no way that Saul could stamp this growth of the believers, even though he desperately endeavoured to do so in Acts 9 verse 1. He's a driven man, an absolutely driven man!

Notice what it says in Acts 9 verse 2, he was quite prepared to take them bound to Jerusalem irrespective of whether they were men or women; who cares about their families? who cares about their children? Men or women, they all came the same as far as Saul was concerned, he wanted to stamp them out. In fact, you know, that's mentioned 3 times, Acts 8 verse 3 - 'haling men and women, he committed them to prison'; Acts 9 verse 2 - 'that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem'; and again, there's a further reference in Acts 22 verse 4 - 'I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women'. He was determined to stamp the truth out, this growth of the believer out, if he possibly could, and it didn't worry the apostle Paul of what sex they were!.

In fact, in Acts 9 verse 2, interesting actually, it says 'that if he found any **of this way**', but do you see what the margin says? the margin's correct - 'if he found any of **the Way**', and you'll notice that the margin refers us to a whole set of references in the Acts of the apostles, which were to talk about the believers, and they were considered to be **in the Way**, those of the Way; and 'the Way' became a phrase which described the believers and the things that they commonly believed amongst themselves, they were those of the Way. Maybe that goes back to the words of Christ, in John 14 verse 6 when He said, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life', so here were those who were the believers of 'the Way'. If Saul could find any of that persuasion, then he would endeavour to bring them down; by the way, I think the phrase 'the Way' goes a lot further back than Jesus, I think it goes back to Genesis 3 and verse 24 when in the garden of Eden, there were cherubim placed to keep **the way** of the tree of life! These people now, b&s, have found the way of the tree of life and they are members of that way, but Saul isn't!

So, in verse 3 of Acts 9 it says, 'As he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him'. As he journeyed, but although Acts 9 verse 3 simply tells us that he was journeying at the time the light came, if you add to your margin Acts 22 verse 6, and Acts 26 verse 13, it tells us in those two places, that he was travelling at **noonday**. Now you'll remember this in terms of our previous study, when Philip caught up to the Ethiopian eunuch, people didn't travel at noonday, it was the hottest part of the day. Why was Saul travelling at noonday? and the suggestion is, of course, that such was his desperate desire to outflank the truth, such was his obsessive spirit about the mission he was on, that he would travel whatever the circumstances of the time. Those that were with Saul at this time, were obliged to travel

at the hottest part of the day, because he was determine to reach Damascus as soon at he possibly could, even if it meant that he travelled in the middle of the day. Yet what's remarkable about this, verse 3, at the time he was travelling, at noonday, there came a light so dazzling and so bright that it made the noonday sun seem as darkness by comparison, so how bright was that light? how bright was the vision that appeared to Saul on this occasion when he's travelling in the brightness of noonday sun itself and yet it's eclipsed absolutely by the light that shone about him from heaven on this occasion? This was a dazzling, blazing light indeed!

Then verse 4 says, 'he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' You know, whenever Luke uses the doubling of a word, it is either to do with **principles of warning or reproach**; the doubling of a name in Luke's hands, Luke is a writer and when he does this it is associated with the idea of warning or approach. Let me just show you 2 or 3 of those, because these would be good cross references for the margin; in the gospel of Luke 10, this is just Luke's examples, you see, this is the same writer, and by the way, it's the word in Acts 9 verse 4 for **Saul**, it's very much the Hebrew form (7586) Shauwl, Shauwl, why persecutest thou Me?' Now have a look at these, Luke 10 verse 41, 'And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha', now do you see how that expression occurs in Luke 10, it's really a tone of reproach, isn't it? Now here's another one in the gospel of Luke, chapter 13 verse 34, reading from verse 33 for connection, 'Nevertheless, I must walk today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem! Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets'; you see how the doubling of the expression there is a tone of reproach, isn't it? out of the mouth of Christ. 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem'. Now here's another one, Luke 22, now what do you make of this one? in Luke 22, this is a famous one; at the time of the circumstances of the Upper Room, we read in verse 31, 'And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, Simon'. So what did that doubling convey? but the same spirit of warning and reproach, and here it is in Acts 9 , 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' and you notice what's interesting about this, not, 'why persecutest thou My brethren', not, 'why persecutest thou My disciples' Acts 9 verse 4, 'why persecutest thou Me'? so the persecution of the disciples of Christ was counted by the Lord as a persecution of Himself.

Come and have a look at Luke 10 verse 16, and this is a tremendous lesson in terms of our spirit in the ecclesia of God, because in Luke 10 verse 16 Christ Himself said this, 'He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him sent Me'. Why are you persecuting Me? and of course, another famous one would be what? Matthew 25. Do you remember this one in Matthew 25 in the parables there and in verse 40, 'The king shall answer and say unto them, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me'. So when in Acts 9 verse 4 the voice from heaven said, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?', the Lord took that persecution that was being committed against His believers, as an affront to Himself, as a persecution upon Himself. By the way, there's another interesting thing that emerges

from that, do you think the Lord felt that? Well, the Lord didn't feel the physical pain but He felt the mental anguish of that, didn't He? He felt the anguish of the persecution of His believers; He might be immortal, He might be in the heavens above, but He feels the pain of that! because His ecclesia, His bride was being persecuted in this way; 'inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto Me'. So therefore, one of the great lessons of ecclesial life, b&s, is for us to remember that the ecclesia is the ecclesia of Christ and the bride of Christ, and the things that we do, one with the other, the one for the other, the one against the other is done to Christ.

Then verse 5 says that Saul having fallen to the ground, 'he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? and he said, Who art thou, Lord?' Now do you think he knew who it was? I think he did! but you see, I think that Saul was in the last stages of denial, because I think from the day that he had seen the death of Stephen, this whole circumstance of the truth had haunted Saul. You see, Saul was the bright young mind of the Pharisees, Saul was the great expositor of the Law, nurtured at the feet of Gamaliel, the hope of the Pharisees. So when he came to argue the cause of the truth with Stephen, in Acts 6 and 7, Stephen trounced him in the scriptures! absolutely trounced him in the scriptures. Saul had no answer for what Stephen said on that occasion, and therefore, in a rage and in a fury he was one of those who consented to the death of that great disciple. Yet somehow, I think that Saul knew within himself that all was not right, that somehow he did not have the answers to all of this puzzle. So he endeavoured to throw himself more furiously into the work, in the hope that somehow it would all resolve itself; but now he's confronted by the vision of the man whose been haunting him. 'Who art thou, Lord?', I think he knew who it was, and by the way, I think he had already met Jesus on more than one occasion.

'He said, who art thou, Lord? and the Lord said, (lest there be any doubt) **I am Jesus whom thou persecutest**'. Now here was a remarkable thing! you see, this man was suppose to be dead, but He's alive and speaking directly to Saul out of heaven. I think in that amazing moment of time, that Saul understood for the first time, the enormity of what he was doing. That the man whom he had been struggling against, not Stephen, but the man whom Stephen followed, the man whom he had been struggling against, Jesus, and the teaching of Jesus, was alive, He was actually **alive**, and speaking to him at that moment. How do you think that Saul felt? it really was like a thunderbolt from heaven.

Then Jesus said in verse 5, 'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks'. Now that's an interesting expression because obviously what Jesus was saying is that whatever it is that Saul was endeavouring to do, he was finding it difficult to do so. So what was he trying to do? Well, the English says he was endeavouring to kick against the pricks; now do you see the word 'kick' there (2979) the Greek word for 'kick' literally means not just to kick but to specifically kick with the heel; **to kick with the heel**. That is the precise meaning of the Greek word. Now if you come back for a moment to John 13, you'll recall this expression, because this came out of the mouth of the Lord as well,

and it came out of the mouth of the Lord concerning another man who had been a traitor to the cause of the truth. In John 13 and verse 18, speaking of Judas, we're told that Jesus said this, 'I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen; but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with Me hath (now here's the phrase) lifted up his heel against Me'. Now you know where that comes from, by the way, it's in the margin, it comes from Psalm 41 verse 9. It's one of the psalms of David that he wrote concerning the betrayal of Ahithophel and when David was betrayed by Ahithophel, one of his closest associates, Jesus took up the words of that Psalm and said that's how Judas has dealt with Me in betraying Me.

But you see the particular expression that's used - 'he that eateth bread with Me, hath (what's he done?) he's lifted up **his heel** against Me'; he's kicked with the heel, as it were! Now where does that take us to? that's Genesis 3 verse 15, isn't it? Now in Genesis 3 verse 15 we're told that the seed of the serpent would strike at the heel of the seed of the woman, and the seed of the woman would strike back and crush the head of the serpent. So, 'he that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me', so you know what we're being told? in John 13 verse 18, that Judas was acting the role of the redeemer in Israel and endeavouring to stamp out Christ as if He were the serpent. That he had lifted up his heel to stamp out Christ - he was trying to reverse Genesis 3 verse 15. Judas was saying, Jesus is the serpent, I am the saviour, so I lift up my heel to strike the head of the serpent and stamp Him out!

Now, that's what I think Christ is saying to Saul in Acts 9 verse 5, that he was kicking with the heel, it is almost the identical idea and the identical expression. What was he kicking against? verse 5, he was kicking against (well, the English word is the word 'pricks' (2759) which has been suggested could mean an ox-goad); so let me show you every other time that that word occurs in the New Testament. There's only a handful of them so we can just go through them: well, firstly Acts 26 verse 14, 'And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks', so that's exactly the same term and, of course, it's referring to exactly the same episode. So it's simply a restatement of the same story. Alright! so that's the first next time that this Greek word 'kentron' is used, the word translated 'pricks' here.

Well, here's the next time it's used, 1 Corinthians 15, it's used twice in two verses, verse 55 and verse 56: and there 'kentron' is translated, 'O death, where is thy (not pricks) but **'sting'**? O grave, where is thy victory? The **sting** (kentron) of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law'. So this is the same word translated in Acts 9 verse 5, but here it's translated 'sting' as in the sting of a serpent, the sting of a serpent that brings death!

And here's the last time that the word is found in the New Testament record, Revelation 9, these are the only other occurrences of this word, outside of Acts 9 and Acts 26 which are both the same episode. In Revelation 9 verse 10 it says, 'And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were 'kentrons' in their tails', there were **'stings'** in their

tails. So how should the word be translated? well, the answer is, that perhaps a better translation based on Revelation 9 and 1 Corinthians 15, is the word 'stings'. So coming back to Acts 9 and verse 5 then, how we would read this is as follows, 'He said, who art thou, Lord, and the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick with the heel against the stings', you see, it's an allusion, isn't it? back to Genesis 3 verse 15 again. What Saul was endeavouring to do, was to stamp out Christ as if He was the serpent and to turn him, Saul, into the great redeemer of the Jewish nation! and now, he's confronted with a voice from heaven that tells him that Jesus is **alive and well**. Do you know what Genesis 3 verse 15 says? it says, 'thou shalt bruise His heel, but He **shall bruise thy head**', and the promise of Genesis 3 verse 15 was that the true seed of the woman, although temporarily bruised, would be **miraculously revived to life and power**, after having dealt a death blow to the serpent; and Jesus, the One who speaks to Saul on this occasion, is clearly alive and well, so He must be **the seed of the woman** of Genesis 3 verse 15. If He's the seed of the woman, then what on earth is Saul doing opposing that work? I think that that must have absolutely struck Saul like a thunderbolt on that occasion. That the One who was speaking to him out of heaven, was the seed of the woman, proven to be so by His resurrection from the dead, that He had only ever been bruised in the heel; He wasn't the serpent, so what was Saul doing, trying to stamp Him out by kicking against the stings?

Verse 6 says (and we can understand perhaps why now, it says this), 'He trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'. His whole world had been turned upside down by the revelation! This is just an aside really but it's important, you know, this wasn't a vision, b&s and young people, this wasn't a vision. I believe that Saul actually saw Christ, he really saw Him! Now you remember, what we do know about the work of the apostles? - that one of the conditions of apostleship was that **they had to have seen the risen Christ**, and Paul is going to stress that in his defence of his apostleship on more than one occasion; he's going to say, 'I have seen Him, I have seen the risen Christ personally', and where did he see Him personally? on this occasion, in Acts 9 verses 4, 5 and 6, in this conversation that took place, he was really talking to Christ and he really saw Him. Let me just show you how that emphasis is placed in the record..

Now look at verse 17 of this same chapter, 'Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, **that appeared unto thee in the way**'. Again, verse 27 of this chapter, 'Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had **seen the Lord in the way**'. Acts 22 verse 14 tells us, 'that **thou shouldest see the Just One**'; Acts 26 verse 16 tells us, '**I have appeared unto thee for this purpose**'; 1 Corinthians 9 verse 1, the apostle Paul says, 'Am I not an apostle? **have I not seen the Lord?**'; and finally in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 8 he says, 'Last of all, **He was seen of me also**', and the apostle Paul consistently claimed, 'I've seen Him', he says. You know, b&s, this man, Saul, is one of only 3 in the entire New Testament record that saw the risen Christ out of heaven; there have only ever been 3 men that actually saw Jesus in that way. The first was Stephen in Acts 7, the second is Saul or Paul in Acts 9, and the third was the

apostle John in the book of Revelation, he **saw, he really saw Him**.

So verse 6 says, 'What will Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, verse 6, Arise, and go into the city and it shall be told thee, what thou must do. And the men who journeyed with him, stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no man'. So they understood that something was going on, but they didn't understand the nature of the conversation or the exchange; they simply stood as dumb while this particular episode took place! 'Arise, and go into the city and it shall be told thee, what thou must do'.

Verse 8 says, 'And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened'. Ah, so his eyes were closed; so so dazzling was the light, so bright was the light, that when he fell to the earth to start with, his eyes were closed against the brightness of the light.

What I think that actually happened was, when he saw that flash of light, he actually saw the form of Jesus in the dazzling brightness, he actually saw Him there! Now as he arises from the earth, he finds that such has been the power of seeing the risen Christ, that he can't see anything now, he's in blackness and darkness; 'when his eyes were opened he saw no man, but they lead him by the hand and brought him into Damascus'. Oh how different was the intention of Saul and the final story of what happened; because the intention of Saul was that he'd march into Damascus, that he would be proclaimed as the great liberator of the Jewish people and verse 2, 'he would lead forth from Damascus, men and women bound unto Jerusalem', and he, the saviour of the Jewish people, would lead them forth. Instead, he's smitten with blindness and verse 8 says, 'and **they lead him** by the hand into the city', and the whole story was going to be wonderfully reversed.

Come and have a look at Deuteronomy 28, you know, in Deuteronomy 28, I wonder if this particular passage came to the apostle's mind, because in Deuteronomy 28 concerning the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience that came upon Israel in olden days, we're told this, Deuteronomy 28 verse 15, 'But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of Yahweh thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee'. Now follows a list of the curses that would come upon the man or the woman that would not observe the true commandments of God to do them; verse 28, 'Yahweh shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: And thou shall **grope at noonday**, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, **and no man shall save thee**'. I wonder if those words sprang into the apostle's mind as helplessly he was lead like a blind man, lead by the hand into Damascus, absolutely dependent upon those that lead him on this occasion. Maybe he wondered about the fulfilment of those things.

Verse 9 of Acts 9 says, now look at this! Look at what verse 9 says! It says that when they lead him into Damascus, 'he was why! 3 days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink'. So what Saul experienced in this verse, was a typical **death and burial** for 3

days, just like his Lord; and do you know what happened at the end of that period of death and burial? verse 18 says, 'Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight, **and arose**', so there was a resurrection from the dead at the end of the 3 days in verse 18 and verse 19, there was a re-building, just as we know that we have first the 'standing up of dead ones' in Anastasis, verse 18, and then the process of re-building to glory in verse 9, 'when he received meat he was strengthened'. So what happens here is that Saul is taken through the very experience of Christ Himself, he goes through a typical death, and burial (he's in darkness, the darkness of death) he neither eats or drinks, he's as good as dead for 3 days, then he comes to resurrection and to newness of life.

What do you reckon he was doing in those three days? Well, I think we know what he was doing, in fact, Jesus is going to tell us shortly what Saul was doing in those 3 days, because in verse 10 of Acts 9 it says, 'There was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias (367), and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias, and he said, Behold, I, Lord', and by the way, that phrase 'behold, I, Lord' is very similar in the Greek of the Septuagint translation for Genesis 22 verse 1 and Isaiah 6 verse 8, remember? 'Here am I, send me', behold, I, it's a Hebrew expression, it's an expression of humility and of readiness for service; 'Ananias, and he said, behold, I, Lord', I'm ready to serve, I'm ready to go'. And the Lord said unto him, verse 11, 'Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus; for behold he **prayeth**'. So that's what the last 3 days have been spent in, he'd been busy praying! As well he might be, because his whole world had just been turned upside down, do you know why? He'd been confronted by the reality of the risen Christ and he'd seen Him, and for 3 days Saul desperately prayed that he might be enlightened in these things, and that his confused mind might be sorted out about all this! He knew now who his Lord was but he needed to understand what he might do. He needed to confess that what he had done was wrong, he needed to come before his God and to admit to failure and to woeful ignorance and to persecuting the very One who now he was going to be turned to serve!.

So Ananias is given a vision that he might go to him. In fact, it says in verse 12, 'he hath seen in a vision, a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem. And hear he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way:' You know, it's interesting actually because what you've got in this chapter is **a double vision**. You've got a double vision exactly as Acts 10; you see, in Acts 9 you've got a vision given to Saul to say what he must do to be saved and in Acts 10 we've got a vision given to Cornelius to say what he must do to be saved. Just as there is a vision given to Saul in Acts 9 and Cornelius in Acts 10, those who are about to have their lives forever changed; so there is a matching vision to the one who's chosen to then lead that person to conversion or repentance. So in Acts 9 a vision is given to Ananias to encourage him to go and do that with Saul, and in Acts 10 a separate vision is given to Peter to encourage him to go and do that with Cornelius. So

in Acts 9 and Acts 10 we have 2 sets of double visions, the one to the man who was about to be converted, and the other to the one who would be the instrument of their conversion and their change. So there's a vision to Ananias in verse 10 and a vision to Saul in verse 12. Now this vision to Saul, of course, in verse 12, is not the initial confrontation on the Damascus road, but a vision clearly after he had been lead into Damascus and was praying to the Father, 'he hath been told in a vision that a man called Ananias will come'.

Interesting you know, Ananias never occurs in the record ever again, apart from this one chapter. He was a good man, in fact, we're told in chapter 22 he was a devout man according to the Law, which probably explains why he was able to get into the house of Judas in verse 11, because Judas, would no doubt have been a law keeper, a Pharisee. Saul would have been lead into the house of one who he knew, but Ananias was well respected amongst the community of the Jews, as a devout man in the matters of the Law, but the great work of this man, interesting you know, you see, you know what his name means? Ananias is the old Hebrew name, 'Hananiah' isn't it? **the grace of Yah**, the grace of God (367 Gr - 2608 Heb) and the great work of this man who only occurs in this one place in the bible record, the great work to be accomplished by this disciple, was **'to reveal God's grace to the champion of Law**. Marvellous thing! and God chose a man whose very name was 'the grace of God' and used him as the instrument to reveal His grace to the one who'd been the champion of the Law; interesting you know, what's the number of grace in the bible? or we say it's the number 5, don't we? we associate the number 5 with grace, well, look at this! Ananias appears in chapter 9 verse 10 twice; in verse 12 once; in verse 13 once; and in verse 17 once, so his name which means 'the grace of God' turns up why! 5 times in the story and he's going to be the manifestation of the Father's grace to this prostrate and blind man praying in the house of Judas.

So verse 15, 'The Lord said unto him, 'Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake'. He's a **chosen vessel unto Me**, now that's interesting because that phrase 'he's a chosen vessel unto Me' is an allusion to the first Servant Song in Isaiah 42 verse 1 and verse 6, 'mine elect, my chosen in whom my soul delights', and you see, Saul or Paul was going to be the servant of God to the Gentiles in just the same way that Jesus was the servant of God to the Jews; so there's a special reason for this allusion to the Servant Songs in Acts 9 verse 15, 'he's a chosen vessel', Isaiah 42 verses 1 and 6, now that's the first servant song.

Now come and have a look at Acts 26 which is the parallel reference and we'll see again the same idea, 'go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel'. Acts 26 verse 16 says, 'But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose; to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, **and from**

the Gentiles; unto whom now I send thee; To open their eyes (that's Isaiah 42) from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me'.

Finally, in Acts 22, which is the third reference to the conversion of Saul. It must have been a pretty important story, you know, because the conversion of Saul occurs in Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26 - there are 3 records of the conversion of this man, So important was the story of this conversion because of the huge consequence it would have upon the Gentile believers coming to a knowledge of the truth. Acts 22 says in verse 14, 'The God of our fathers **hath chosen thee**, same allusion to the first servant song, 'that thou shouldest know His will and **see that Just One** and shouldest **hear the voice** of His mouth'. That phrase 'see and hear', by the way, comes from Isaiah 52 and verse 15 which is the last servant song. It's an allusion to Isaiah 52 verse 15, so I believe, that as Ananias came (tape turned) passages concerning the servant of God in the book of Isaiah. The whole point of that was, that Paul was going to be the servant to the Gentiles, he was going to be 'Christ' to the Gentiles; he was going to take up the very work of Christ and extend it to the Gentiles. This man who had persecuted the believers.

Then Acts 9 verse 17 says, and by the way, if you were Ananias at that time, and you heard of a man who was a persecutor of the ecclesia, one who haled men and women and took them into prison, one who is prepared to lead them bound back to Jerusalem, one who's prepared to compel them to blaspheme; would you have gone unto this man? If you had heard all these stories about how he was such a persecutor of the true believers, what would you have done if you were Ananias? In fact, as it was Ananias showed how reluctant he was to accept this commission from Christ; just as Moses had been reluctant in Exodus 4, and Samuel had shrunk from his commitment in 1 Samuel 3, and Jonah didn't want to go in Jonah 1, and Jeremiah didn't want to accept his responsibilities in Jeremiah 1; so now Ananias hesitates to do this thing because of what Saul was like and what had been said about him. Yet when Jesus said to Ananias, verse 15, (and it's just a lovely little connection here) 'The Lord said unto him, **Go thy way**', and verse 17 says, 'Ananias **went his way**', see that? You see, when it says in verse 17 that he went his way, he was actually doing that in **obedience** to the Lord's command in verse 15, wasn't he? Go thy way and he went his way, and he went straightaway, and he responded immediately, and he responded in faith. 'And entering into the house he put his hands on him and said, Brother Saul, the Lord, Jesus who appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest; hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit'. He went straight into that house, put his hands on him and said, 'Brother Saul'; you can imagine how Saul felt on this occasion, these were people that he had persecuted, and yet this man was able to come into the house without fear and to put his hands upon him and call him, brother Saul! Imagine how big Saul would have felt on that occasion, he would have felt absolutely humble to be addressed in that way. 'The Lord Jesus who appeared unto you in the way, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the

Holy Spirit'.

Then verse 18 says, and how true it was, '**immediately** there fell from his eyes as it had been scales:' it was as if he'd never seen anything properly before! It's as if he had never understood the truth, and now, all of a sudden, the scales had fallen away and he understood the Old Testament concerning Messiah. He understood so much, he had more to learn yet, but he understood enough now that it was as if, not just that his sight had been restored, but his understanding had been restored, just as if scales had fallen from his eyes. 'And he received sight forthwith, and **arose**', marvellous, he stood up like a dead man! Come and have a look at chapter 22, by the way, just hold your hand in Acts 9, and come to chapter 22 verse 13, so he received sight forthwith and arose, and Acts 22 verse 13 says, 'Brother Saul, receive thy sight; and in the same hour I looked up upon him and he said, The God of our fathers have chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto men, of what thou hast **seen and heard**. And now why tarriest thou? **arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins**, calling on the name of the Lord'. So, I think, b&s, that we've got to fit all of that into Acts 9 after the word 'he received sight forthwith' and before the word 'he arose'; that in between those two are the words here of Ananias, in Acts 22 verses 14 to 16, and now 'why tarriest thou, arise and be baptized'. So when Acts 9 verse 18 says he did arise and was baptized, he did so in response to the words of Ananias who told him to do it. He'd been waiting for this, he'd been praying for this for 3 days of spiritual deadness and now the command came from this man. Do you see what it says in Acts 22, by the way? it said, verse 13, and I want you to take particular note of this, that when Ananias came in and he laid his hands on him, he said, 'Brother Saul receive thy sight' and the scales came off his eyes and his eyes blinked open and guess what he saw? What was the very first thing that Saul saw? and the answer is, the smiling face of this man, of this disciple called Ananias, and b&s, when this man Saul was converted to the truth and arose out of the blackness of death after 3 days, he opened his eyes and he looked into the face of **the grace of God!** That's what he saw! he looked into the face of the grace of God. There in the smiling face of Ananias the disciple, he saw and felt God's grace revealed to him.

Now come and have a look at this because this is a fantastic connection! 1 Corinthians 15, I think this is an allusion to this episode in the life of the apostle; I think when he looks back on that dramatic moment, as he felt the cool touch of those hands upon him and he felt the scales slipping away, as it were, from his eyes, and he looked into the face of that man, he never forgot that moment. This is what he said in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 9, 'For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the ecclesia of God. But, **by the grace of God** (Ananias - Strong's 367) I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me'. I think he remembered that moment when he looked into the face of that man, and he knew that the grace of God, and the mercy of God and the favour of God had come upon him and that he might be restored, that he might now become a diligent follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he might take the name of

the risen Christ to **all the Gentiles** as a chosen vessel. It was a dramatic and wonderful moment in the life of Saul, he would forever be changed; and it all counts from that moment when the grace of God was revealed to him, by the touch and the words of this disciple of Damascus.

Well, it was an important moment in the history of the first century ecclesia, because this dramatic conversion of this man, would mark the turning point, the watershed, for the truth now going out to the uttermost parts of the earth, and here was the great champion that would take it forth; it needed something as dramatic as this to turn the life of this man around. What do we need, b&s, to have our lives turned around? We've never seen the risen Christ in the way that Saul did, but we know He's alive! We know that Christ is raised from the dead, we know He's in heaven, and somehow we need to capture the thrill and the excitement of the turning point in this man's life, and feel that the truth has the power to change us as well and that the grace of God has come upon us as well, that we also might go forth and in the words of a later verse in this chapter, **'prove that this man is very Christ.'**