

Acts 051

Paul's Conversion

Acts 9:1-7

September 11, 2024

Dr. Andy Woods

Let's take our Bibles this evening and open them to Acts 9. Before we took a break for the summer, we had completed Acts 8. Tonight we move verse by verse into Acts 9. You remember what the Book of Acts is about: the Book of Acts is about the birth and the growth of the church.

Message



- Birth and growth of the church numerically, geographically, ethnically.
- Components
 - Numerically (progress reports)
 - Geographically (From Jerusalem to Rome)
 - Ethnically (From Judaism to Gentile domination)



Luke, who is writing this, is selectively putting all of this history together. His prequel was Luke's Gospel. His sequel is the Book of Acts that we are studying. It is written to a man named Theophilus, who was a Gentile who was wavering, not so much in conversion, but having doubts after he was saved.

Have you guys ever had doubts after you got saved? Theophilus is in that position, and he is probably wondering, "Is all of this Jewish focus—is it for me?" The Bible is so Jewish. It is so Hebraic. Jesus was Jewish. Jesus spent his whole ministry within the borders of Israel. Here Theophilus is, a Gentile believer in Rome, and he is probably wondering if, as a Gentile and a believer, he is in the right place, and whether he has believed the right thing.

So to solidify Theophilus, who has his doubts, Luke puts together these two books (Luke and Acts), which are basically historical masterpieces, showing that the Gentiles (which would include us as well) have always been contemplated in the plan and program of God. In fact, when you go back to our studies in Genesis, Genesis 12:3, God raised up Israel to be a blessing to the nations. Israel's blessings were never just for Israel. They were for the world.

Luke, in these two books (Luke and Acts), is first showing that Gentile focus in the ministry of Jesus on the earth, in the Gospel of Luke; and secondarily, showing that Gentile focus in Jesus' ministering to the Gentiles from the right hand of the Father through the church, in the Book of Acts.

One of the key players in the birth and growth of the church is a man named Saul of Tarsus, who, as we are going to see in our chapter here, is going to become the apostle Paul. Saul's conversion to Christianity, when Saul became Paul, is given not just once in Acts—not just twice in Acts—it is given three times. Those three chapters are Acts 9 (which we are going to start looking at tonight), Acts 22, and Acts 26.

It is basically the same conversion account, but as you might imagine, each chapter brings up little details that the other ones do not. So you have to, at some point, step back and say, "Why do I need three chapters talking about Saul's conversion to becoming the apostle Paul? Isn't one chapter enough?" Well, apparently Luke wanted this history documented for Theophilus because Paul, as you know, is a huge player in the church.

Paul is the apostle born out of due season. He is the one who got outside the borders of Israel and took the gospel on the three missionary journeys, ultimately taking it to Rome, where Theophilus was. Paul is the guy who writes thirteen New Testament letters. Two thirds of our epistles are written by Paul.

If you do not have a conversion of Paul, you can imagine what we would not have. Christianity, as we know it today, would not look the same or be the same at all if it was not for God's work through this man born out of due season, the apostle Paul.

Paul was a "Johnny Come Lately" in the sense that he was not one of the original twelve apostles. He was never an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus. He was never an eyewitness to the resurrected Christ. Christ had already ascended back into heaven in Acts 1 before Saul of Tarsus was saved in Acts 9.

So how did Paul get saved, and how did he go from being a God hater, to the point that he had blood on his hands—that was his hatred for the early church—how did he go from a guy with blood on his hands, to being one of the greatest advocates and promoters of what today we call Christianity? Well, Acts 9 is the beginning of the story. Acts 22 repeats the story. Acts 26 repeats the story.

Theophilus is reading this saying, "You know what? If God did all of this work to get the gospel to me in Rome through Paul, then I should not have any doubts as a Gentile that I am contemplated in God's program." So that is the significance of the chapter we are moving into.

Acts 9:1-43 Saul's Conversion

- I. Saul (9:1-31)
- II. Peter (Acts 9:32-43)



Acts 9 has two parts. There is the conversion of Saul, Acts 9:1-31; and then it stops talking about Saul and it starts dealing with Peter, in Acts 9:32-11:30. It is a little bit strange that Saul, when he is converted to Paul, is given this charge of reaching the Gentiles. In fact, if you look at Acts 9:15, it says,

"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;'" (Acts 9:15).

You might wonder, "If Paul is given that commission, why does the biblical story stop and start focusing on Peter towards the end of Acts 9 through Acts 11, when Peter is the apostle to the Jews primarily?" Well, the answer to that is that Saul, who became Paul, could not do what God called him to do until Peter first opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. That conversion of a man named Cornelius, the first Gentile saved, is going to happen in Acts 10. It is going to be repeated for us in Acts 11.

Once the door is open for the Gentiles, then the door is open for Saul, who now is Paul, to do his thing. But Peter has to open the door first. You say, "Well, why does Peter have to open the door first?" Remember what Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16:19:

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven;..." (Matthew 16:19).

Peter is the guy who has to open the door first to different people groups before Saul, or Paul, can walk through the door, because of what Jesus said back in Matthew 16 at Caesarea Philippi, which is up north. He talked about the church, how the gates of Hades would not prevail against the church. And He said, "To you are given the keys of the kingdom" (paraphrase, Matthew 16:19).

So who led the first Gentile Jews to Christ in Acts 2? Peter. Who was the one who had to lay hands on the half-breed Samaritans in Acts 8 before they could receive the Holy Spirit? Peter. And Peter is not finished opening doors with the keys given to him by

Jesus. He has to open the door to the Gentiles. So he will bring the gospel to Cornelius in Acts 10-11.

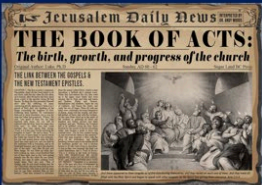
Once that is taken care of and the door is open, Saul, who is now Paul, can fulfill his commission of being the apostle to the Gentiles. That is why you have all of this information about Saul, and then it suddenly stops right towards the end of the chapter (Acts 9), and then the focus becomes Peter. There is an actual reason that it had to happen that way.

I will try to bring that point up more as we start working through this material. So the first thing to understand is how this guy Saul of Tarsus gets saved. Here is an outline. Obviously we cannot finish this whole thing tonight, so do not panic. If you were in a normal church, you would finish it tonight, but you are in an abnormal church.

I. Saul

Acts 9:1-31

- A. Revelation (1-9)
- B. Healing (10-19a)
- C. Preaching (19b-22)
- D. Conspiracy against Saul (23-25)
- E. Return to Jerusalem (26-30)
- F. Saul's progress (31)



There is the revelation that Saul received on the Damascus Road, Acts 9:19, when he was blinded. Then he was healed, Acts 9:10-19. Then he immediately started preaching in the synagogue—not to the Gentiles, but in the synagogue, because Peter had not turned the key yet for the Gentiles to come in (Acts 9:19-22).

Then there was a conspiracy, immediately, to kill Saul, Acts 9:23-25. He returned from Damascus, where his conversion happened, to Jerusalem, Acts 9:26-30. Then Acts 9 ends with the progress of Saul, who is now Paul. The story stops with Saul, who is now Paul, then the focus is on Peter for a few chapters because he has one more keyhole

that he has to put the key in before the gospel is opened up to the Gentiles.

A.

Acts 9:1-9

Revelation

1. Saul's persecution (1-2)
2. Saul's revelation (3-7)
3. Saul's reaction (8-9)



Tonight we are going to take a look at the revelation that Saul received leading to his conversion, Acts 9:1-9. We have Saul's persecution, Acts 9:1-2; Saul's revelation from God, Acts 9:3-7; and then Saul's reaction, Acts 9:8-9. Notice, first of all, his persecution.

1.

Acts 9:1-2

Saul's Persecution

- a) Instigator (1a)
- b) To the high priest (1b)
- c) Request for letters (2a)
- d) Saul's plan (2b)



Saul was the instigator up to this point in time of horrific persecution against the early church. In fact, he was the one who was actually holding the cloaks of the stone throwers, literally, who were martyring Stephen (the first martyr of the Christian era, or the Church Age) in Acts 7. Saul of Tarsus was the one who had blood on his hands and turned up all of the trouble.

Notice his role as an instigator. It says in Acts 9:1,

"Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest," (Acts 9:1).

Still coming out of his mouth was venom and hatred against the early church. You can see that hatred in Acts 8:1. It says,

"Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him [Stephen] to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1).

Saul of Tarsus caused that persecution and scattering. Take a look at Acts 8:3. It says,

"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison" (Acts 8:3).

This is the same guy who would write these words in 2 Timothy 3:12:.

"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Paul knew all about persecution as a believer, and he knew about the persecution that he was causing to the early church as an unbeliever. And this is the guy that God is going to turn around right here.

You might have a friend or a coworker or so-and-so, such-and-such, and you might say, "They will never get saved. They are beyond the reach of God." What we learn here is that no one is beyond the reach of God, even people who have blood on their hands and are the most horrific, anti-God, anti-Christian people you can imagine.

We have a few of those in the United States, I think. Some of them get elected to office. We just look at them and we say, "They are outside of the reach of God. They are gone." The truth of the matter is that as long as people are alive, nobody is gone. God can reach and turn around anybody, and turn them from being one of the greatest villains of Christianity to one of the greatest advocates.

You continue on in Acts 9:1 and it says that Saul, in his unbelieving state, went to the high priest. Now what he is going to do is get some letters from the high priest that allow him to go into the synagogues in Damascus (I will show you a map of where Damascus is in just a minute; it is nearby) where these Jewish believers are, and he is going to rip them out of the synagogues, and he is going to take them by force back to Jerusalem to throw them in prison. That is his plan.

You might be wondering why he has to go to the high priest to do that. You are not going to find the answer to that in the Bible. It is in one of the apocryphal books. If you are interested, it is in 1 Maccabees 15:15-24. Now, the Maccabees books we as Protestants do not accept as inspired of God.

If you are talking to your Roman Catholic friends and you look at their Bible, their Bible will be bigger than yours because really late in the game—I am talking 1,500 years after Jesus ascended to heaven—the Roman Catholic Church and the Council of Trent jammed the apocryphal books into their biblical canon.

Why did they do it? Because the Protestant movement had started, and Luther was talking about salvation by faith alone. The Roman Catholic Church was arguing with him, and Luther was saying, "Well, salvation by faith alone. It is right here in the Bible. It is in the books of Galatians and Romans."

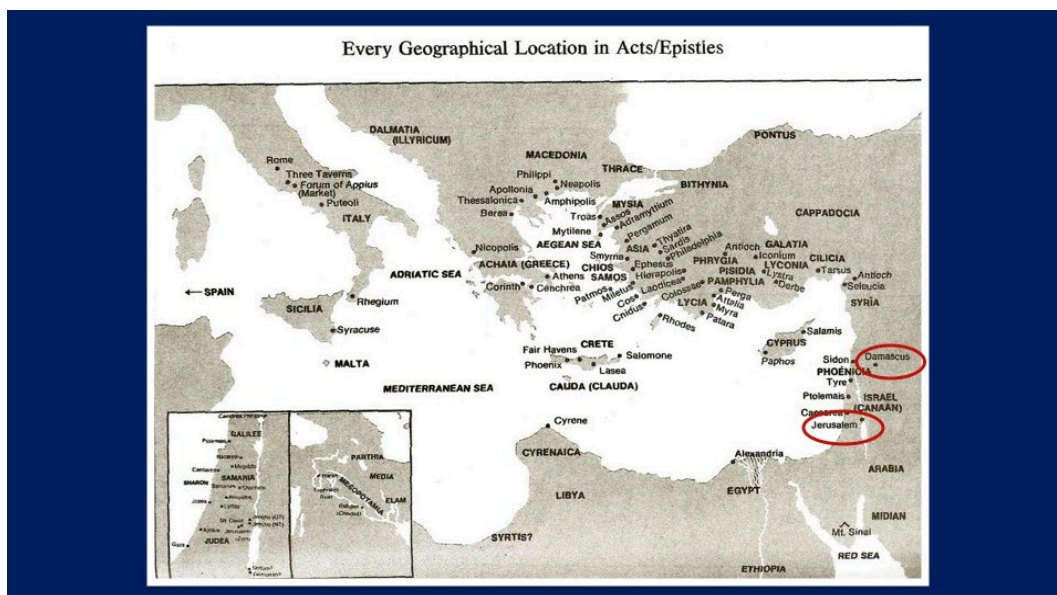
The Catholic Church said, "Well, we have a Bible too. Here is what we are going to do. We are going to take a vote. We are going to take these apocryphal books written before the time of Christ, and we are going to jam them into the Roman Catholic Bible. So when Luther says, 'The Scripture says this,' we can say, 'No, the Scripture says, 'Salvation by works.'"

So my point is, we do not accept those books as canonical. But having said that, they still can contain in them some valid history that helps us understand the Bible a little better. They are not inspired; they are not apostolic; but it is like reading Josephus or some other historian of the time period. They help us figure out the history of the Bible and why certain things happen.

So that is why I quote Maccabees here. I do not quote it because God inspired it. I quote it because there is some history in it that helps us explain why Saul had to go to the high priest to get these letters for permission to go to the synagogues in Damascus. There was an extradition treaty that was put into place between Israel and Rome long before Jesus showed up, allowing Saul to do this. So that is what he is doing.

He is going to the high priest, and he is making a request for these letters. You see it in Acts 9:2. It says,

"and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus,..." (Acts 9:2).



Where is Damascus? Well, there you see Jerusalem, if your eyes are good—that lower circle. North from Jerusalem, within the land of Israel, is this place called Damascus. A lot of the Jewish believers in Jesus who had just been saved (a lot of them were saved through Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2) fled to Damascus.

Why did they flee? Because Saul of Tarsus scattered them. That is why they fled. That is Acts 8:3, after Stephen was martyred. Saul heard what Stephen said. Stephen gave a tremendous speech there in Acts 7. He depicted the guilt of national Israel. Saul of Tarsus and the other Jews with him were so angry about this that they were gnashing their teeth and covering their ears so they did not have to hear.

Stephen's speech just pushed Saul over the edge, and he launched this horrific wave of persecution against the church. All of these disciples who had been won to Christ through Peter were now scattered in different places. One of the places they went was Damascus.

Saul said, "I am not going to let them get far. I am going to get letters from the high priest, which I am allowed to get through this extradition treaty, to yank them back here to Jerusalem so that they can be incarcerated." Acts 8:3-4 says,

"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison. Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:3-4).

In Acts 11:19 it says,

"So those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone" (Acts 11:19).

So that is why the Jewish Christians were scattered, and that is why Saul wants these letters from the high priest. Take a look there at Acts 9:2. It mentions Saul's plan in the second part of Acts 9:2. It says,

"and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:2).

Now notice here that Saul is after the men and the women. You might have noticed that in Acts 8:3.

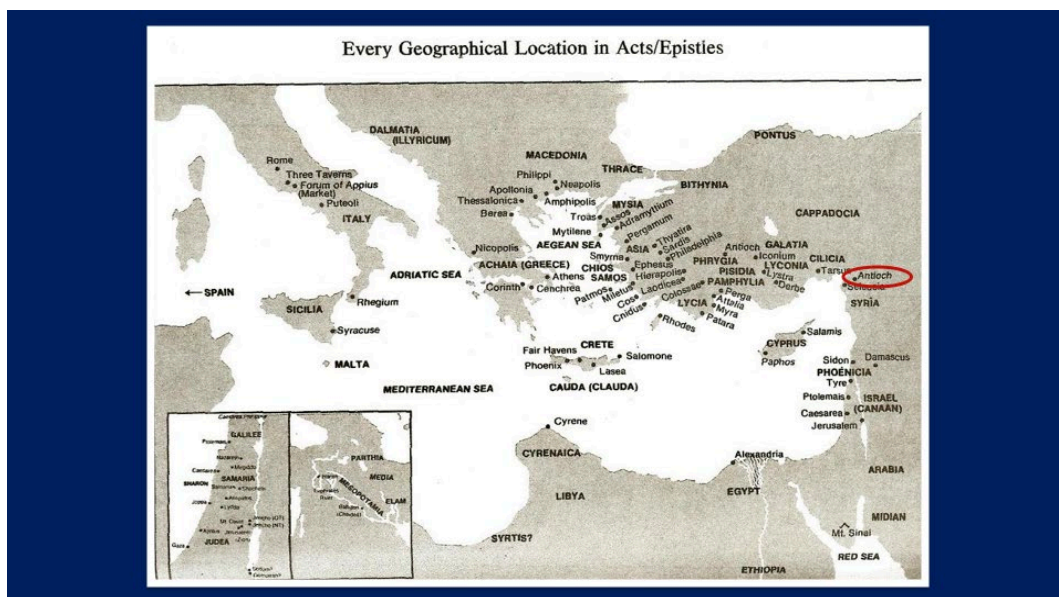
"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, dragging off men and women,..." (Acts 8:3).

There is a huge emphasis in Luke's Gospel on women. Women, as you probably know, were treated very poorly in this culture. But God does not look at women that way. Women have a huge role to play in the body of Christ. It is interesting that even the villains of Christianity know that. If women were not factors, then why would he be trying

to incarcerate the women as well as the men? You will see that a lot as we move through the Book of Acts—regarding the prayer meetings that were taking place, Luke would mention that it was men and women together.

Acts 9:2 says that Saul wants to bind the Christians and he wants to bring them from Damascus back to Jerusalem. You will also notice here that in the early church they are not even called Christians. They are called "the Way." It is not until you get to Acts 11:26 that the word "Christian" is used for the first time.

The church is going to make its way up to Antioch. There are going to be considerable numbers there. Saul of Tarsus is going to be involved in a ministry edifying a large number of Christians in Antioch. That is the first time this group of believers is called "Christians."



Why did they call these people "Christians"? Well, they called them "Christians" because these people were so much like Jesus in terms of their character and lifestyle that the only name that fit them was "Christians." But they do not get that name until Acts 11:26. It says in Acts 11:26,

"and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

So the name "Christian" is not even on the radar screen right now. In Acts 9, the church is just known as "the Way." There are about six times in the Book of Acts where the church is called "the Way." Acts 9:2, which we just read, calls the church "the Way." Acts 19:9 says,

"But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way..." (Acts 19:9).

Acts 19:23 says,

"About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way" (Acts 19:23).

In Acts 22:4, Saul of Tarsus, in his testimony, says,

"I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons," (Acts 22:4).

In Acts 24:14 Paul says,

"But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers,... " (Acts 24:14).

Acts 24:22 says,

"But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off,... " (Acts 24:22).

So the early church is not even called Christians at this point. They are just called "the Way." So where do they get this title "the Way"? Why do they call themselves "the Way"? Why did they get this designation "the Way"? Well, remember, these are all Jewish people. There is not a New Testament yet. The earliest books of the New Testament probably are not even in existence yet.

Their whole ministry that they are doing is from Hebrew Bible, which we call the Old Testament. They turned the whole world upside down (Acts 17:6), without a New Testament. That is why I am a little bit disturbed with some statements people make. Andy Stanley, for example, talks about how we have to unhitch today from the Old Testament. I am thinking to myself, "Excuse me. The early church turned the world upside down with nothing but what we today call the Old Testament."

In the Old Testament there is a description of "the Way," and this may be where they got this expression "the Way" from. Do you know of any churches today calling themselves "the Way"? I do not really hear much of that. Isaiah 40:3 is probably where the expression comes from. It is a Messianic prophecy. It says,

*"A voice is calling,
'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness;
Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God'" (Isaiah 40:3).*

So this highway, in the end times, in the Millennial Kingdom, which is going to serve as a bridge navigated by Jesus from all around the world to the city of Jerusalem, is called "the Way." That could be where the early Christians got this title from. But they did not have any steeples; they did not have any stained glass windows; they did not have any church buildings; they did not have any church budgets.

They were just a little group of persecuted people within the nation of Israel, a lot of them being killed or being scattered everywhere. They did not even have the designation "Christian" yet. That does not come until Acts 11:26. So why is Luke giving us this information about how the church was first called "the Way"?

Well, he is explaining to Theophilus, through this selective record of history that he is comprising here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, how the church was born and how it matured, or grew, numerically, geographically, and ethnically. It started as "the Way." Eventually it took on the name "Christian."

Eventually Paul is going to leave the borders of Israel and the church will start becoming predominantly Gentile. But that is not how things started. This is carefully crafted history showing how God nurtured the church supernaturally along, because that is how much God loves Theophilus and wanted to see the gospel eventually get to Rome, where Theophilus was most likely saved.

So Saul is headed off to Damascus with these letters from the high priest. He is going to arrest these people, and he is going to haul them back to Jerusalem. That is his plan. The problem is that God has another plan. Is it not interesting how God interrupts our plans? We can thank God that He does.

I have had so many things in my life get interrupted, and sometimes when they are interrupted, I get upset. Then five years later, I am saying, "Lord, forgive me for getting upset. You knew exactly what You were doing, because what You had in mind was far greater than my stupid little plan."

In fact, I had a youth pastor once who said, "If you want to make God laugh, show Him your plans for your life. That is like a little five-year-old showing their coloring thing, and God is thinking in terms of engineering and Venn diagrams." We are so impressed with our little coloring book that we are showing up to God: "These are my plans." And God is saying, "You have no idea."

A.

Acts 9:1-9

Revelation

1. Saul's persecution (1-2)
2. Saul's revelation (3-7)
3. Saul's reaction (8-9)



So Saul has his plan and God has His plan. As Saul is moving to Damascus, he gets a revelation from God, Acts 9:3-7. The first thing we are told here is the place of this revelation.

2.

Acts 9:3-7
Saul's Revelation

a) Place (3a)

b) Revelation (3b)

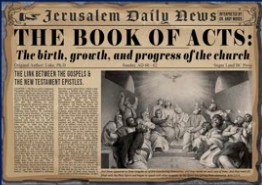
c) Sound (4)

d) Saul's response (5a)

e) Christ's self disclosure (5b)

f) Christ's instructions to Saul (6)

g) Reaction of Saul's companions (7)



Acts 9:3 says,

"As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus,..."
(Acts 9:3).

So he was near Damascus, an area that some call the Damascus Road. He was getting ready to put his arresting of this little group of the Way into motion. You see how these are real places: Jerusalem, Damascus. We are reading a history book here. Luke is a first-rate historian.

Luke, probably more than any other biblical writer I can think of, is very careful at documenting historical places, because he wants Theophilus to understand that this really happened. "This is how God worked in history to get the gospel to you, Theophilus, because He loves you that much."

Acts 9:3 says,

"As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;" (Acts 9:3).

I believe that was the Shekinah glory of God that Saul saw. This is why Satan comes as an angel of light: because Satan wants to be God, so he imitates God. But the ultimate source of light is not Satan. The ultimate source of light is God Himself. It is the Shekinah glory of God.

In fact, 1 Timothy 6:16 says this of God:

"who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen" (1 Timothy 6:16).

God is a source of light as early as Genesis 1:3. This is the first day of creation. It says,

"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light" (Genesis 1:3).

"Well, wait a minute, pastor. The light comes from the sun, right?" No. Light does come from the sun. But God does not need the sun, because the sun and the moon and the stars do not come into existence until day four of the Creation Week. Genesis 1:14 says,

"Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years;'" (Genesis 1:14).

So if the sun does not come into existence until day four, Genesis 1:14, then what is the source of the light on day one? It is God. So why does God allow the history to read this way? Because God knows that people throughout the ages would start to worship the sun—not the Son, the sun. There is a reference to that in Deuteronomy 4:19, warning the children of Israel:

"And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven" (Deuteronomy 4:19).

God knew people would start to worship the creation rather than the created thing, so He intentionally allowed Himself to be understood on the first page of His Book as the source of light on day one, before the sun came into existence. God does not need the sun, but He chose to put the sun in its place to give light. But if something happened to the sun, it is not as if there is no more light, because God Himself is the source of light.

By the way, in the eternal state, described in the last two chapters of the Bible, is there going to be a sun? There is going to be a Son, but not a sun. Revelation 21:23 says,

"And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Revelation 21:23).

Revelation 22:5 says,

"And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).

So if you think God needs the sun, just read Genesis 1 and then read the last two chapters of the Bible. There was a time when there was light before the sun ever came

into existence. It is foolish to worship the sun instead of God. God can exhibit light from His own character and nature. He is clothed in it without the help of a secondary source.

The evolutionists got the whole thing backwards, if you listen to a chronology from an evolutionist—who, by the way, was never there to see it. In fact, you can go to the Museum of Science and Industry out here in Houston, and they will put on a big movie for you of how everything came into existence. They have the Big Bang, and they have the sun coming into existence, and then the earth comes into existence.

You read your Bible, and the order is exactly the opposite. The earth comes into existence first—water comes into existence, and then God brings the dry land out of the water—and then the sun does not even come into existence until day four in the Creation Week. By the way, the evolutionist has the Big Bang at the beginning.

When does God put the Big Bang? He puts it at the end, when He dissolves everything by fire. There is your Big Bang, if you are interested—just at the end, not at the beginning. Man has the whole thing mixed up and backwards. You would expect that because man was not there. God was.

So Saul is blinded by this light, and then he hears the sound in Acts 9:4.

"and he fell to the ground and heard a voice..." (Acts 9:4).

This is something that he saw that blinded him, and then it is something that he heard. It was obviously pretty intense because he fell to the ground when he heard it. Why the focus on hearing? Because the light that he saw has blinded him. He has lost his sight temporarily. We know that who is causing these things is none other than Jesus, because Jesus talks to him at this point.

"...a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" (Acts 9:4).

Saul fell to the ground when he was blinded by the light, he heard a voice, and the voice said,

"...'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" (Acts 9:4).

Now, notice the doubling of Saul's name. Jesus does not just say "Saul." He says "Saul" twice: *"'Saul, Saul'" (Acts 9:4)*. That is common in Scripture when God gives major revelations to people. When God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 22:11, telling him to sacrifice Isaac, and then telling him not to sacrifice Isaac, you will notice the doubling of Abraham's name. Genesis 22:11 says,

"But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am'" (Genesis 22:11).

The same thing happened to Moses when Moses was called into the ministry. Exodus 3:4 says,

"When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am'" (Exodus 3:4).

How about the calling of Samuel? Have you ever had trouble sleeping at night and you hear your name being called by the Lord? You might want to pay attention to that.

First Samuel 3:10 says,

"Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for Your servant is listening'" (1 Samuel 3:10).

That is probably the best reaction in those circumstances. "You obviously want to say something to me, Lord. What is it? I am all ears." You will notice this theology that is very developed at such an early point.

"And He said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,'" (Acts 9:5).

Back to Acts 9:4:

"...'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" (Acts 9:4).

In Ephesians 5:22-24 we are going to learn that Christ is the head of the church.

"For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church,..." (Ephesians 5:23).

Colossians 1:18 also speaks of this. Remember that Ephesians and Colossians were written back to back, Colossians developing the head of the body, Jesus, Ephesians developing the body connected to the head. Colossians 1:18 says,

"He is also head of the body, the church;..." (Colossians 1:18).

So that is why Jesus is saying here,

"...'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" (Acts 9:4).

"You are coming after My body, metaphorically: the church. You are hurting Me in the process because I am connected to the body." The body of Christ started in Acts 2. That is when the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit started, where God took men and women who were believers in Jesus and at the point of faith connected them to His metaphorical body called the church.

Saul, who is going to become Paul, is going to explain all this theology in Ephesians and Colossians, books that would not be written for quite some time. But right here you see that theology coming into existence. If Christ is the head and His people are the body, if you come against the body, you are coming against Him, because He is the head connected to the body.

It is interesting that if something goes wrong with your body—I do not know about you guys, but I am completely and totally miserable. My whole day is ruined. For example, sometimes I will cut my fingernails a little too short. My wife has fixed that. I have gotten into this manicure and pedicure stuff. Do you guys ever do that? She kept telling me, "You need to get a pedicure. You need to get a manicure." And I am like, "I am not doing that. What is that all about?"

Now it is so neat. I cannot wait to go back for the next one. It is really neat. Men and women do it. I did not know that. But before my manicure days, I would cut my fingernails not very well, and then I would get an ingrown fingernail. And with an ingrown fingernail, all you can think about is how much it hurts. When you grab something in the fridge it hurts. The rest of your body could be great, but you just focus on that one part of your body that hurts.

Well, that is what it is like when people come against Christ's body, the church. They are coming against the head, which is connected to the body. So this is tremendous theology that is hinted at here. It is not going to get a full development until Saul will write about it in the books of Ephesians and Colossians.

You see Saul's response in Acts 9:5.

"And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?'..." (Acts 9:5).

He asks Jesus a question because he does not know anything about spiritual truth, and he wants to know who is speaking to him. Where does this vision come from? Now, you will notice that Saul calls Jesus "Lord." The Lordship Salvation people will take that and say, "See—Saul, right at the beginning, submitted his life completely to the Lordship of Christ."

Well, the guy is not even saved yet. He is not submitting to the Lordship of Christ. He is using the word "Lord" as a polite way of saying "sir" or "mister." I would not read into that a bunch of Lordship Salvation type teaching. It is the word "Lord" ("kyrios" [κύριος]), but Saul does not know anything about the Lordship of Christ.

He has blood on his hands. He is in a lifestyle that is rebelling against God, and he has just got an intervention from God Himself, and he wants to know who is doing the intervening. So he refers to this voice and this light politely as "Lord."

Every time you read the word "Lord" in the Bible, you cannot get it to mean that people are completely submitted to Christ's Lordship. We are pro-Lordship in that sense: growing believers should submit their lives unto Christ. But Lordship Salvation makes that as a prerequisite to be justified, which is a false doctrine. That is a doctrine of works.

They say, "Well, all Christians are submitted to Christ's Lordship." Really? What do you do with Acts 10:14, where Peter is going to be shown the sheet and the animals on the sheet, and he is going to hear a voice that says, "Arise and eat," and says, "I can't eat

that stuff. The Mosaic Law forbade us from eating that stuff for 1,500 years." "Peter, arise and eat." Remember what Peter says in Acts 10:14?

"...By no means, Lord,..." (Acts 10:14).

"Not so, Lord." Well, that is an oxymoron, isn't it? That is a self-contradicting phrase. That is like saying "government efficiency," "government intelligence," "jumbo shrimp," or "Microsoft Works"—those kinds of things.

Peter says,

"...By no means, Lord,..." (Acts 10:14).

So Peter himself, although clearly saved and used by God, struggled with Lordship ideas as he was a growing Christian. Should you submit to Christ's Lordship in every sense? We should. That should be a goal. But we should not say, "If you are not doing it in a certain area, then you never were saved to begin with." That is not what the Bible teaches at all.

What the Bible teaches is that you are saved by grace as a free gift, and then God moves us from birth to growth. If you want to grow as a Christian, that will involve submission to His authority. But just because you are not growing right does not mean you were not born. Aren't there people in the natural world who are malnourished? They are not developing correctly. Are we going to say they were never born?

Malnourishment does not mean you were not born. Not submitting to Christ's Lordship is not a birth issue. It is a growth—maturity—issue. Christians struggle with that, and because they are under bad teaching on this, they are always second-guessing whether they are Christians. I am going to talk a lot about these kinds of things in our Sunday School series that we are starting this Sunday on the doctrine of Neo-Calvinism. So I will postpone talking about that.

In Saul's response, he just politely refers to this intervener as "Lord." He wants to know who this is. So Jesus discloses Himself.

"...And He [Jesus] said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,'" (Acts 9:5).

"Well, Jesus, I am not persecuting you. I am just persecuting these people calling themselves 'the Way.'" "No, you are persecuting Me, because that is Me metaphorical body, and I am connected to them as their head. That is the body of Christ that started in Acts 2, which you are going to write about later, Saul, in a book called 1 Corinthians (12:13). You are going to write about that. You do not know that yet."

So Jesus says, "I am the One whom you are persecuting. You persecute the body, you persecute Me. You persecute the body, you persecute the head." That is a different way of looking at Christians who are being persecuted today. Christians all over the world are being persecuted. We know that.

We are fortunate here in North America, where we have not faced a lot of the things people have faced in different parts of the world. But the Voice of Martyrs and those kinds of organizations document all of this persecution against Christians that is on the rise worldwide. It could very well come here to the United States of America.

I hope that people who are doing this persecution understand—most of them do not—that when you mistreat a Christian, you are mistreating Jesus Himself because you just came against His body, which is connected to His head, which is the nerve center, the brain. Pain, as I understand it, comes from the nerves connected to the brain.

"... 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'... 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 9:4-5).

Then Jesus gives Saul some instructions in Acts 9:6.

"'but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do'" (Acts 9:6).

"Arise, go into the city of Damascus, and wait." I hate it when the Lord tells me that. I hate to wait. My prayer is, "Lord, give me patience and give it to me right now." I want the roadmap ahead of time. But if God gave me the roadmap ahead of time, I would not have to walk by faith, right? Without faith, it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus does not tell Saul everything. And there is a lot that is going to happen in this man's life. He is told none of it at this point. He is just told to get up, go into the city of Damascus, and wait. Then you see the reaction of Saul's companions in Acts 9:7.

"The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one" (Acts 9:7).

Now, we have a case here of a potential Bible contradiction, which everybody wants to find, because they feel if they can find a Bible contradiction, they can discredit the Bible, and therefore they are not under the Bible's authority. That is really why people are trying to find alleged Bible contradictions.

There are things in the Bible that, at first glance, look contradictory. But the job of a good attorney is to take discrepancies in a transcript from different witnesses and harmonize the statements so that they are not contradictory. If you are on the other side, you are trying to find the contradiction. But if you are trying to defend somebody, you are trying to harmonize alleged contradictions—things that look contradictory but really are not contradictory.

The example I like to use is of the three men touching an elephant, all blindfolded. One man is touching the elephant's side, and his testimony is that the elephant is like a giant wall. Another man is grabbing the elephant's trunk, and his testimony is that the elephant feels like a giant tube. Another blindfolded man is touching the elephant's foot, and he says, "I feel five lumps on the foot," referring to the five toes on an elephant's foot.

You listen to all those testimonies and you think they are all touching a different animal, but then you take the blindfolds off and there is no contradiction at all, because they are all feeling different sides of the same animal. So they are not describing different animals. They are all describing the same animal.

That is how you try to work your way through these alleged Bible contradictions. The natural man who is in rebellion against God is always trying to discredit the Bible by finding alleged contradictions.

It is like W. C. Fields as he was getting ready to die. He was not known for his godliness, by the way. There he was with his Bible, thumbing through it, and someone saw him and said, "What in the world is a guy like you doing with the Bible?" He said, "I am looking for loopholes." "I gotta figure out a way to discredit this Book before I die, because I do not want to be under this Book's moral authority."

Acts 9:7 says,

"The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one" (Acts 9:7).

When you go to Paul giving his testimony in Acts 22:9, it says,

"And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure,..." (Acts 22:9).

Some versions say, "did not hear the voice" there. So Acts 22:9 says that they did not hear the voice and Acts 9:7 says that they heard the voice. So people say, "Well, the Bible contradicts itself." Not so fast. Arnold Fruchtenbaum writes this:.

"According to verse 7, the men who journeyed with Saul stood speechless. They heard the voice, but saw no one. Some claim that there is a contradiction between Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9, which states: 'they heard not the voice.'"¹

So did they hear the voice, or did they not hear the voice?

"However, if one understands Greek, there is no contradiction. In [Acts] 9:7, the word 'voice' ('phōnēs') [from which we get the word 'telephone'] is used with a genitive. In [Acts] 22:9, it [the same word] is used with an accusative. [Accusative is a direct object.] To hear a voice with a genitive simply means 'to hear a sound,' but to hear it with an accusative means 'to hear with understanding.' The point is that Saul's travel companions heard something [they obviously heard something because Acts 9:7 says that they heard the voice], but they could not understand the words. Only Saul actually understood the articulated words."²

¹ Dr. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 211.

² Ibid.

So Acts 22:9 is really talking about hearing with understanding and not just hearing. Acts 22:9 says,

"And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, [here is how the New American Standard Bible translates it:] but did not understand the voice..." (Acts 22:9).

They heard it, but they did not understand it. So Acts 22:9 is focusing on the understanding. Acts 9:7 is focused on the hearing. Can you hear something without understanding it? You guys have kids and grandkids. You could tell them to do something and they could completely and totally tune you out, and they are five feet away.

I do this with my wife all the time, and she rightfully confronts me on that. "Did you just hear what I said?" "Oh, yeah, I heard it, but I am going to listen now." So you can hear something and just tune something out. You can hear something, but tune someone out and really not pay attention to what they are saying. I hope you do not do that with your pastor, by the way. You should not just hear your pastor. You should understand your pastor.

So that is how to resolve this alleged Bible contradiction, which means that there is no contradiction, which means, to the natural man, "Take a seat until you find something else that you can use to discredit the Bible, because this is not a contradiction at all." So we have this revelation, and then Saul gives a reaction. It looks like I am out of time. So we are going to pick it up there with the reaction next week as we keep moving our way through this material on Saul's conversion.