

## BROKEN AND FILLED

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When we studied Acts 8, we were introduced to 3 new major characters: Saul, Philip and Simon. We left Saul aside because there is so much to say about him.

Luke introduced (God's chosen vessel whom He chose to take the gospel to the gentiles.

- We saw that a great persecution broke out following Stephen's death.
- In order to understand the severity of the persecution, we need to understand **WHO IS THIS MAN?**

Acts 9:1 "**Meanwhile**" indicates a continuity of the story.

The story of Philip is inserted in between as... An account of the event that took place between Chap. 7 and 9.

Acts 7:58 ... **Meanwhile**, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named **Saul**.

Acts 8:1 **And Saul** was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

3 But **Saul** began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, **he** dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ { [5] Or Messiah } there.

Acts 9:1 **Meanwhile**, **Saul** was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. **He** went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if **he** found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, **he** might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

We can have a better idea what kind of person Saul was before his conversion, in reading what he wrote Philippians (*30 years after this event, he looked back.*)

Phil 3:5 For I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real Jew if there ever was one! What's more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law.

6 And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault.

In those early days, we can see that his belief in God and his relationship with God was in the flesh—**For I was circumcised**

*(He was very religious, but not saved. Religion cannot save you.)*

- He was a **pure-blooded Jew** (Not an Hellenist) born of Hebrew parents and proud of it.
- Concerning the observance of the law—I **was a member of the Pharisees**
- Concerning his zeal for God and Israel—**Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church**
- Concerning his devotion to what he believed to be true—I **obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault.** "found blameless".

*(In matter of religion, he excelled...)*

Gala 1:13 (NIV) For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.

14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

- We learn more in 1Tim 1:13

1Tim 1:13 (NIV) Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. *(We must understand blasphemer and violent)*

**Blasphemer**—Blasphemous, speaking evil, slanderous, reproachful, railing, abusive.

**Violent man**—Hubristes, One who uplifted with pride, heaps insulting language upon others and does shameful acts to them. [arrogant & injurious]

- NLT 1 Tim 1:13 even though I used to scoff at the name of Christ. I hunted down his people, harming them in every way I could. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.
- CEV 1 Tim 1:13 I used to say terrible and insulting things about him, and I was cruel...

Acts 8:3 (NIV) But Saul began to **destroy** the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

After looking back, we can understand better what kind of persecution happened...

**DESTROY**—"lomainomai" means put a sign of dishonor, disgrace, shame... to treat shamefully with injury... (like ferocious animal).

Saul, along with a wild mob entered every house... dragging men & women (not sparing anyone, regardless of age or gender)- determined to abuse them, to dishonor them, insulting them, trying by force and injury to make them blaspheme against Christ.

In the Jewish law of this time, if someone killed another out of religious zeal, he was sanctified. They called it **“the zeal of God”**. (based upon the high priest Phineas in the OT).

John 16:2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.

- We learn more about Paul through his own testimony in:

Acts 22:19 "Lord," I replied, "these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. 20 And when the blood of your martyr {[20] Or witness} Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him."

Acts 26:9 (NIV) "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them .

11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

#### Observe the expressions:

- 26:9 **I too was convinced** ..to do all that was possible to oppose the name...
- 26:11 **In my obsession against them**... I went to foreign cities (Damascus is only one of them. Damascus 130 miles north-east of Jerusalem, 6 days journey. This alone bears testimony to his commitment to his cause...
  - to imprison and beat, I put many of the saints in prison.
  - giving approval of their death, I cast my vote against them.
  - To have them punished and I tried to force them to blaspheme...
    - *Here, Christianity is referred to **as the Way**; this seems to be the earliest "name" for the Christian movement, and a fitting one - used five times in Acts*
    - *Christianity is more than a belief or a set of opinions or doctrines; it is a way of living as well as believing*
- **Let's continue Saul's story...**

Acts 9:3 (NIV) As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.

8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

#### WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS VIOLENT MAN?

- A spectacular event that must be regarded as unusual; God does not *normally* confront sinners with a heavenly light and an audible voice from heaven
- Saul's reaction was simply to fall to the ground, this wasn't honor or reverence for God, he was terrified at the heavenly light

THE HEAVENLY VOICE SPOKE: 4 "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Short but life-changing conversation)

Saul answered: 5 "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

- Jesus didn't have to say anything more than I am Jesus
- **Who was Jesus to Saul until that crucial event?**
- A dead man, disgraced, who had been rejected by the religious leaders in Jerusalem... Suddenly, the Jesus he thought dead was alive...
- Saul knew who Jesus was; he probably heard Him teach in Jerusalem, and having access to the Sanhedrin, either he could have been present at the trial of Jesus or at the least, he would know all the details of it...
- The expression 4 "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" carries two revelations - EMPHASIZING

1. **you persecute me** – All the sufferings you inflicted to my people, YOU INFLICTED TO ME. I suffer WHEN MY PEOPLE SUFFERS... We see in it “the unity of Christ to his church”. This theme became one of the great theme of Paul’s teaching...
  2. **why** – “Saul, why are you trying such a futile thing?” I am above you in heaven; you cannot stop my work. Who do you think you’re fighting against? “You’re going nowhere with this, you better change your ways.”
- Saul is confronted by the true nature of his crime: he is persecuting God, not man  
Paul’s own testimony in other text adds more details as:

Acts 26:14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? **It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**’

15 “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” the Lord replied.

In saying **It is hard for you to kick against the goads**, Jesus is giving Saul a “mini-parable”

- A goad was a long, extremely sharp stick that was used to get an ox going the way you wanted him; a pointed rod used to urge, or stimulate or spur on an animal
  - **WHAT A SHOCK:** Saul thought that he was doing God a service in his vicious attacks on Christians; but now he discovers that he has been fighting against God
- Acts 22:10 (NIV) “‘**What shall I do, Lord?**’” I asked. “‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’”
- Saul asked **two of the most important questions** someone can (and must) ask: *Who are You, Lord?* and *Lord, what do You want me to do?*

*A recent Gallup Survey asked people to choose three questions they would most like to ask God. The top five responses:*

*Will there ever be lasting world peace? How can I be a better person? What does the future hold for me and my family? Will there ever be a cure for all diseases? Why is there suffering in the world?*

- All these questions are answered in the Bible; but they really aren't the most important questions for us to ask. Saul asks the right questions!

**Who are You, Lord?** indicates a genuine desire to know God.

**What do You want me to do?** Indicates the realization of a superior authority and a willingness to surrender to the will of God. *That is important in the process of conversion...*

- When Saul heard his name 4 “Saul, Saul, why do you **persecute me?**” He recognized the presence of a superior authority: “Lord”—Kurios -one who has control, the master, the emperor, a title expressing reverence and respect and also given to God, the Messiah...
- Saul's question was *personal*. *Lord, what do You want me to do?* showing a heart that is truly surrendered to God. He really expressed that he believed and he surrendered to the Lordship of the One who called him on the road.
- Jesus responds to Saul's question *Lord, what do You want me to do?* by telling him only what to do immediately
- This is often how God directs us — one step at a time so that we can learn to continually trust him and walk by faith...

• From what Paul says about this experience in Acts 26:12-18 and 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8; from what Barnabas says about Saul's experience in Acts 9:27, and from what Ananias says about Saul's experience in Acts 9:17, **we see that Jesus appeared to Saul personally here in this vision**

1Cor 9:1 (NIV) Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

1Cor 15:8 (NIV) and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Acts 9:27 (NIV) But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him...

Acts 9:17 (NIV) Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

- **The fact that Saul was *trembling and astonished*** by all of this reminds us that it is not always pleasant to encounter he even dramatically; Saul was terrified by this experience, not floating in the spirit with exuberant feelings—*Think of the day of judgment, or a near-death experience.*

Acts 9:8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 **For three days he was blind**, and **did not eat or drink anything.**

Acts 22:11 My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

- Paul left Jerusalem armed with official authority and self-confidence to go to Damascus and now he was being led in Damascus, for he was blind and defeated.
- He became the blind slave of Jesus Christ...

Roma 1:1 (NKJV) Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called [to] [be] an apostle, separated to the gospel of God

### WAS SAUL BORN AGAIN AS A RESULT OF THIS ENCOUNTER ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS ?

Looking at Ananias in 2 different conversations will help us:

1. Ananias and the Lord
2. Ananias and Saul

We see a wonderful picture of the intimate communion between Ananias and His Lord.

Ananias is called a disciple and the Lord spoke to him by name in a vision... The way Luke wrote about it, makes the supernatural sounds very natural.

Acts 9:10 (NIV) In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord." he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

- God spoke to Ananias in a totally different way that He spoke to Saul;
- Saul had kind of a violent and shocking encounter with God; but Ananias heard the voice of God sweetly in a vision. When God called, Ananias responded "Yes, Lord,"
- God's instructions to Ananias were clear, and God even told Ananias about Saul's vision in Ananias' own vision! "Go to that house, to the street, seek that man..."
- v. 11 ...for he is praying: In the past, Paul's heart was proud and even though he had said many prayers, he only repeated formal prayers. His prayers were not spiritual; he had never prayed to Jesus or with Jesus as mediator; He only prayed on the basis of his own self-righteousness.
- **We learn from God himself that now Paul was truly praying**
- We learn from God that **he also had a vision** during these three days where he was blind and **fasting** (sign of humility before God).

### • Is there any more evidence indicating that he was saved?

Acts 9:15 (NIV) But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! **This man is my chosen instrument** to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.

Acts 9:16 (NIV) I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

- The Lord did not say "will be my instrument", but, "**IS my chosen instrument.**"
- In verse 16, God said "I will show him how much he will suffer for my name". This, God had not yet shown him "I will show him", but the first part, He already did.
- In Acts 26:16, we find out that God had already revealed his plan for him in part in the appearance...

Acts 26:16 (NIV) "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.

- His action indicated that he repented—He obeyed the instructions and he accepted humbly to be led in Damascus...

Acts 9:17 (NIV) Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "**Brother Saul**, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.

19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

- Ananias called Saul, "**Brother Saul**". He recognized the new relationship.
- He was truly saved. His experience did not stop there...
- Then Ananias said: "The Lord who appeared to you sent me so that you may see again (experience his healing power) and be filled with the Holy Spirit. He had to be saved before he was to receive the fullness of the HS.
- God had "broken" the proud, self-righteous and rebellious Saul; but it wasn't God's intention to leave him broken. God wanted to break Saul so He could fill him.

- Ananias commanded him to be baptized

Acts 22:16 (NIV) And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

- See how rapidly he was commanded to be baptized right after his conversion.

This water baptism was a sign of a breaking with the past.

- He was not the Saul the violent persecutor anymore. He was a broken vessel, newly filled with new life, new faith, new power, a **chosen instrument** to carry my name before the Gentiles.
- In that case the baptism of the Spirit was followed by water baptism as his outward public confession.

#### CONCLUSION

Paul regarded his conversion experience as a pattern for all believers:

*1Tim 1:13 (NIV) Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.*

*1Tim 1:16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.*

Saul's conversion reminds us that,

- Religion cannot save you.
- Being convinced about religion does not make you right...
- Being zealous for religion may lead you to fight against God's purpose.

#### Being Religious Does Not Make Us Right With God.

A. Paul was a very religious individual.

1. Acts 22:3
  - a. He was trained by the leading Jewish teacher of his day.
  - b. He was zealous toward God.
2. Gal. 1:13-14 Phi. 3:4-6
3. His journey to Damascus was prompted by religion.

a. Acts 22:4-5 Acts 26:9-12

B. Paul thought he was serving God.

1. Acts 26:9
2. God said he was fighting against Him.
  - a. Acts 9:5

- It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks, means he was kicking against God.
- Jesus must confront our sin and rebellion against God, even if it is done in ignorance and unbelief.
- Salvation is something God does in us; what we do is only a response to His work in us
- God finds us, even when we are not looking for Him
- God looks for people to cooperate in the conversion of others, (Barnabas and Ananias) to show the importance of the *family* of God
- it isn't enough that we be broken before God, God desires to fill us with His Spirit.

What are the most important questions in your life right now?

- Are you kicking against the goads?