

and probably fifteen miles distant." (McGarvey: **Commentary On Acts I**, p. 163).

The broad fertile plain of Philistia was thickly set with villages in Philip's time and offered a productive field for many years of evangelistic effort.

#### 5. IN CAESAREA. 40d.

The distance from Azotus to Caesarea was about sixty miles. Caesarea was the northernmost city in the evangelistic tour of Philip. It is here with his family that we find him some five or six years later. (Cf. 21:7, 8.)

### THE CONVERSION AND EARLY LABORS OF SAUL

9:1-30 Galatians 1:17-24

For a moment let us pause and look back over the pathway of the narrative. Luke has given the following events since the beginning of this section:

1. The city of Zion was our starting point. What was the first point mentioned in this new section? You will recall, it was the persecution that arose at the death of Stephen. And who was the leader in this persecution? Saul, the young man who looked on with cruel satisfaction while Stephen was crushed by the stones of his assassins. Why do we hear nothing more of this man?

2. The historian sees fit to follow the experiences of one of those who fled from Jerusalem and presents the life and work of Philip.

3. The success of Philip in Samaria suggests the part the apostles Peter and John played in this event.

4. Finally Luke outlines the conversion of the eunuch and the departure of Philip.

#### 1. AT JERUSALEM. 9:1, 2.

1 But Saul, yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2. and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

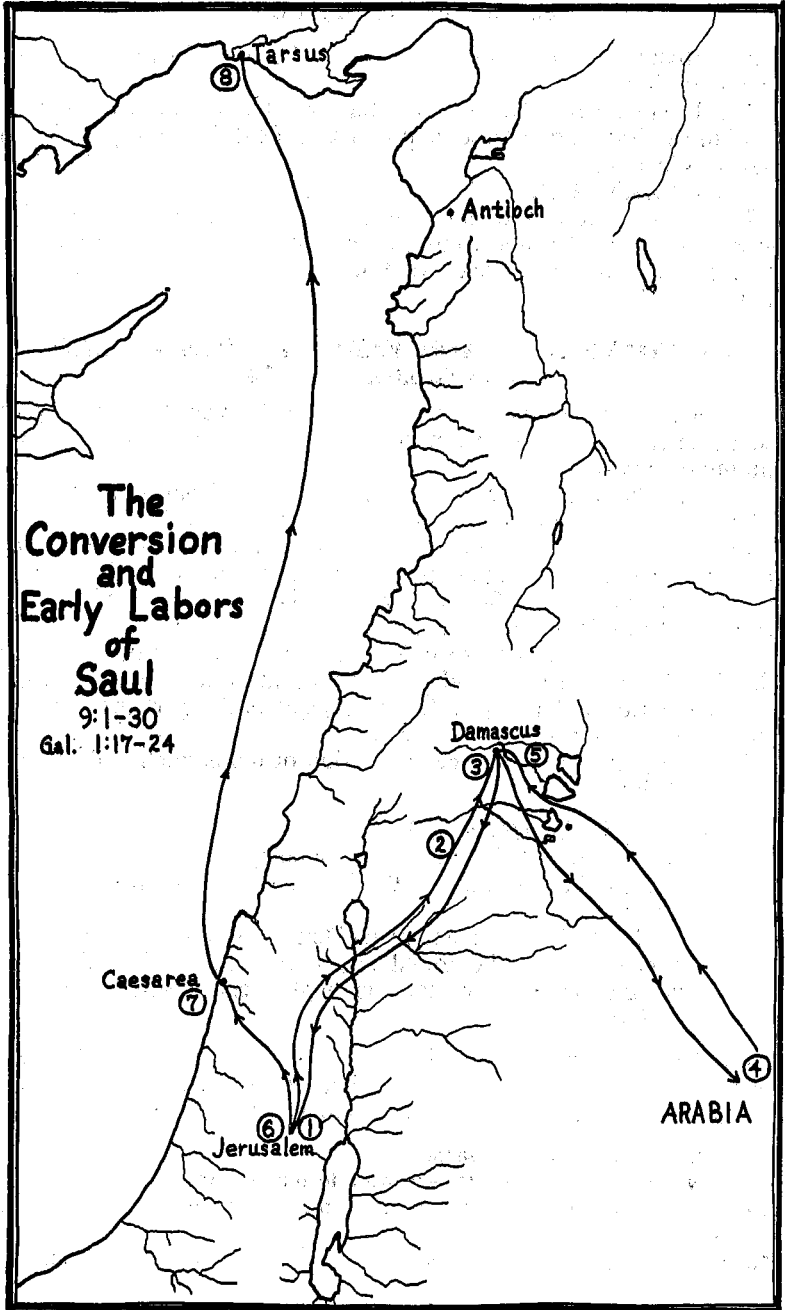
1-2 Now we are back in Jerusalem. What is happening? Well, what was the condition of the city when we left? . . . The situation has not changed nor improved for Saul is "yet breathing threaten-

273. Tell two facts about Caesarea.

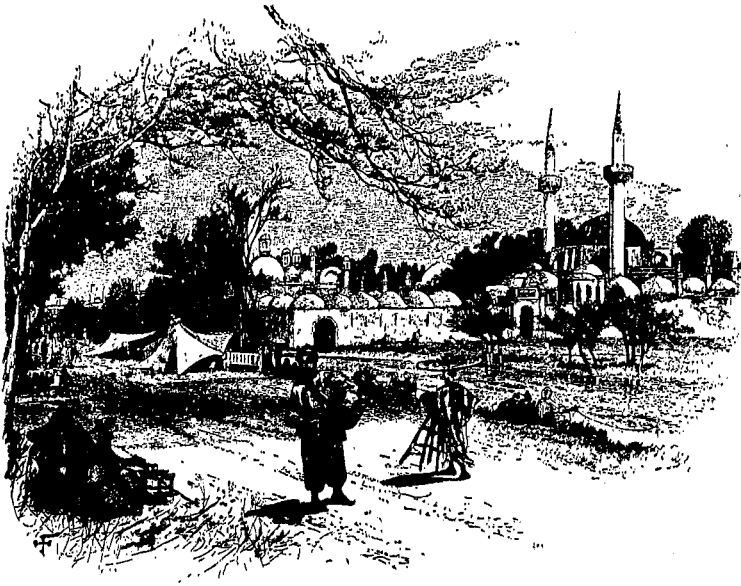
274. How does the death of Stephen relate to this section?

275. Where was Saul during the events of the life of Philip? What was he doing?

276. Why do we not hear any more of Saul after he is first mentioned in 7:58?



## ACTS MADE ACTUAL



### ENTRANCE TO DAMASCUS

By the new French road through the Merj or meadow, west of the city. The large building on the right, with its many domes and two slender minarets, is the Tekiyeh, or hospital for pilgrims, built by Sultan Selim I in A D 1516.

About 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem was the city of Damascus. It is situated in a fertile plain at the foot of Mount Hermon. It was at the head of the most important small state of ancient Syria, and probably no other city of the present day can trace its history so far back in the annals of the world. (**Historical Geography** p. 80.) Paul entered this city with his eyes closed by the power of God. How many cities do we enter with our eyes closed to the needs of the people of its streets and shops? The world is doomed. The instability of earthly things is apparent everywhere. Saving souls is the only thing worth while. It ought to be the chief end of every man's life. It was for Paul; is it for you?

ings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." Yea, he is not satisfied to wreck havoc only among the church in Jerusalem. He can not rest with this, his zeal in his mad opposition would take him to any and all places where Christians might be found. When Saul hears of Christians in Damascus he immediately takes steps to carry his persecution to this city.

The high priest of Jerusalem would, by virtue of his office, have jurisdiction over the Jews of all synagogues. Hence, Saul went to the high priest that he might secure letters that would grant him authority to go into the synagogues of Damascus and ferret out all the disciples of the Way, whether men or women. Saul intended to treat those of Damascus as criminals. He hoped to bring them bound in chains to Jerusalem. Such arrests were not ordinarily permitted in a foreign city. They could be carried out here because the governor of the district was in sympathy with such action. (Cf. II Cor. 11:32).

**2. ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS. 9:3-8a.**

3 And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he drew nigh unto Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven:

4 and he fell upon the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest:

6 but rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but beholding no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened he saw nothing;

**3-8a** What a prospect for conversion! There was nothing in the mind or attitude of Saul that would suggest the right-about-face that was to be made on this Damascus road. The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus was about 140 miles. If the company of Saul traveled twenty miles each day it would have been the noon of the seventh day that his conversion took place. While the walls of the city of Damascus loomed before him there suddenly "shone round about him a light out of heaven." Since the conversion of Saul is recorded in three places in the book of Acts, we deem it helpful to here present a harmony of these three records:

"And it came to pass (whereupon) as I made my journey (journeyed) to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief

277. How could the high priest have influence in Damascus?

278. What is significant about the name used to describe the Christians of Damascus?

279. How far was the distance to Damascus from Jerusalem? How long do you suppose it took to make the trip?

priests, and I drew nigh unto Damascus about noon (midday) suddenly there shone (I saw on the way) from heaven a great light, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them that journeyed with me.

And when we were all fallen (and I fell upon the earth) to the earth (ground), I heard a voice saying unto me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goad. And I said (answered), "Who are thou, Lord? And he said (the Lord said), I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest.

And the men that journeyed with me (were with me) stood (**evidently they had risen in the meantime**) speechless, hearing the voice (or "sound"), but they heard not (**understood not**; I Cor. 14:2) the voice of him that spake to me.

And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and stand upon thy feet, and go into Damascus (the city,) and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do (what thou must do); for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness, both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear to thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me.

And I (Saul) arose from the earth, and when my eyes were opened (**having been closed upon seeing the bright light and the Lord**), I saw nothing. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, they led me (being led) by the hand of them that were with me, and brought me (I came) into Damascus. And I was there three days without sight and did neither eat nor drink."

### 3. IN DAMASCUS. 9:8b-22.

8b and they led him by the hand, and brought him to Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink.

10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said unto him in a vision, Ananias.

And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go to the street

280. What was the precise time of the conversion of Saul?

281. Read 9:7 and 22:9 and then explain the apparent contradiction.

282. Read 9:7 and 26:14 and explain the apparent contradiction.

283. Give in your own words the message Jesus spoke to Saul on the Damascus road.

- which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus: for behold, he prayeth;
- 12 and he hath seen a man named Ananias coming in, and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight.
- 13 But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to thy saints at Jerusalem:
- 14 and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name.
- 15 But 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:
- 16 for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake.
- 17 And Ananias departed, and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto thee in the way which thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- 18 And straightway there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight; and he arose and was baptized;
- 19 and he took food and was strengthened. And he was certain days with the disciples that were at Damascus.
- 20 And straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God.
- 21 And all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of them that called on this name? and he had come hither for this intent, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests.
- 22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the Christ.

**10-16** "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there, departed, and entered into the house and came unto me, and standing by, and laying his hands on me said, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And straightway there fell from my eyes as it were scales and in that very hour I received my sight and I looked upon him.

284. Tell what you know of the character and position of Ananias.

285. Why did Ananias call Saul "brother?"

And he said, The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from His mouth; the Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto thee in the way which thou camest, hath sent me that thou mayest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. For thou shalt be a witness for him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on His name. And I arose and was baptized; and I took food and was strengthened." Acts 9:3-9, 17-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18 are interwoven so as to make a complete narrative of all the facts stated in each account (Compiled by Wilbur Fields). Here are a few further points in this conversion.

1. Saul believed and repented and confessed Christ as "Lord." (This is the same word used in the epistles when referring to Jesus as the Christ).

These events that occurred on the road accomplished a "conversion." The word conversion carries the thought of a complete change of mind and heart. But Saul was not forgiven of his sins until he had arisen and was baptized and "washed away his sins" (22:16).

Conversion takes place in the heart of the sinner but forgiveness occurs in the heart of God. Faith, repentance and confession completes the one, baptism completes the other.

2. Any effort exerted against the church is an effort directed against Christ. This thought is vividly portrayed in the fact that the church is "the body of Christ" (Eph. 1:22, 23). One cannot do injury to the body without affecting the head.

3. Jesus did not tell Saul what to do to be saved but rather directed him to a humble disciple in Damascus (9:6). The Lord never has and never will directly tell any soul what to do to be saved for He has ordained through the "foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21).

**8b-9** When the light above the brightness of the Syrian sun fell upon Saul, Saul saw Jesus in all His effulgent glory. He could not, however, bear this intense brightness for long. Indeed he was blinded by it.

Following his conversation with Jesus, he lifted himself from the dust of the Damascus road and opened his eyes. The Lord had opened the eyes of Saul's understanding but had blinded the eyes of his body. (To say then that Ananias was sent to give Saul his spiritual sight is an absurdity, seeing that this was clearly given to him in what he saw and heard.)

286. What two things did Ananias mention as the purpose for his being sent to Saul?

287. What were the scales spoken of in verse eighteen? Was this not the receiving of his spiritual sight?

What a contrast do we behold in the humble penitent believer being led by the hand into Damascus from the maddened Pharisee who was to march through the gates of the city in a triumphant quest for "any that were of the Way." What thoughts of guilt and humiliation must have coursed through the mind of Saul as he followed in darkness the hand of him who led him.

Jesus had told Saul that it would be told him what he must do. But He did not say when Saul was to receive this information. Saul evidently felt that his sin was so great that he could only fast and pray. This he would do until his Lord would again speak to him. God knew what was best so He left Saul in this state for three days and nights.

The Master had said that it was "hard for him to kick against the goad." In this statement we have some indication of the thought that Saul in his heart of hearts was troubled concerning this Jesus of Nazareth. The death of Stephen had made a profound impression upon his mind (22:20). He must have been one of the synagogue of the Libertines since he was from Cilicia (6:9). If so he with others was not able to withstand the power and wisdom by which Stephen spake. The proof from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Christ must have been presented by Stephen. And then Saul was present when Stephen made his defense before the Sanhedrin (26:10). All of these influences were galling the conscience of this young man.

Saul's intense persecution was but a quenching of the voice of his conscience. When his heart was filled with anger and selfrighteousness and his life with activity he had no time nor inclination to listen to the call of his better self. But now in the house of Judas on the street called Straight, as he knelt in prayer, all of these pent up feelings and facts came all at once into focus. He saw clearly for the first time the dark picture of his evil work.

10 Sometime during the course of the three days there appeared in the mind of Saul the image of a man whom he had never seen. The vision was so clear, however, that he knew he would recognize him if he were to see him in person. As he meditated he saw in this vision this stranger come up to him and lay his hands upon him to give him his sight.

288. Explain the difference in the use and meaning of the words "conversion" and "salvation" as found in the case of Saul.
289. Did Jesus tell Saul what to do to be saved? What import does this have for us?
290. Did Saul see Jesus when he looked into the bright light?
291. What is the meaning of the phrase "it is hard for thee to kick against the goad?"
292. Do you believe that the intense zeal of Saul's opposition to Christ had anything to do with his conscience?



This man whom God had shown to Saul was a humble disciple of Jesus named Ananias. A short time after Christ appeared to Saul the Lord spoke to Ananias calling him by name. Ananias promptly answered with the statement that suggested a desire to hear and do the bidding of the Lord. "Behold I am here, Lord." The words of instruction were direct and explicit; he was told where to go and what to do. Ananias reacted like many of us would today. He asked "Why?" And then added the reason for his query. Hear him say: "Go and make a call on Saul of Tarsus? Why Lord when I think of what many fellow disciples have told me of the terrible cruelties of Saul in Jerusalem, then when I know that he is here armed with authority for the same purpose I cannot understand, I am filled with fear."

See the wonderful patience and love of our great God. Who is man to question the authority and word of Jehovah? And yet although the Lord insists on obedience He does not do so without reason. "Go thy way" or we might say "Arise and do my bidding." Then follows the explanation Ananias wanted "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 many things he must suffer for my name's sake."

**17-19** We have already spoken of the events that took place upon the meeting of Saul and Ananias so it will not be necessary here to repeat them. The only word we would add is that Ananias must have given the Holy Spirit to Saul in the same way Peter gave the Holy Spirit to the three thousand, i.e. when Saul was baptized he received, as did those on Pentecost, the gift from God, the Holy Spirit.

How long did Saul remain in Damascus following his conversion? We have no way of knowing. But we do know that he began immediately to carry out the commission given him by Jesus.

**20-22** He made no apology for his work or word but came out boldly with the message that Jesus of Nazareth was none other than the Son of God. (How could he call Him anything else after having seen Him as he did?) Saul's preaching was done in the very synagogues he had previously hoped to enter as a persecutor. Imagine the surprise of those who heard. There must have been present not only those disciples of the Lord but also those who were as zealous for the law as Saul had been. Despite both suspicion and unbelief Saul increased in strength and laid before the minds and

293. What was the response of Ananias to the call of God? What is revealed in the answer of God to his hesitancy?
294. Why would it be natural for us to imagine that Saul would declare that Jesus was the "Son of God?"
295. What is paradoxical about the place where Saul preached Jesus?
296. Tell of the reasons for the amazement on the part of those who heard Saul.

hearts of all present such proof that this Jesus was the Christ that the Jews who would not accept were at least "confounded." How alike was the response of these Jews to that of Saul with the message of Stephen (6:8-10).

4. **IN ARABIA. 9:23a.** Gal. 1:17a.

23 And when many days were fulfilled,

**23a** There is but a sentence to tell us of this period in the life of Saul. The construction of the sentences in Gal. 1:17, 18 would seem to indicate that the three year period spoken of had as its limitations the conversion of Saul and his return to Damascus; i.e. it was three years from his conversion to his return to Damascus from Arabia.

What Saul did while in Arabia has been the subject of no little discussion. It would seem to the writer in view of the commission given to him and of the immediate response to it in Damascus that Saul would have continued his preaching in the country of Arabia. The fact that there were numerous cities in the district of Arabia adjunct to Damascus, lends support to this contention. The governor of Damascus was under the authority of Aretas the king of Arabia (II Cor. 11:32). Indeed Damascus was but a city in the kingdom of Arabia. Hence, it would not be at all unusual to imagine Saul evangelizing this district. We agree with the thought that it would be inconsistent with the restless nature of the apostle to imagine him spending an extended period of time meditating in the desert of Arabia. Further than this such was not necessary in light of the fact that he received his message directly from God.

5. **BACK IN DAMASCUS. 9:23b-25.** Gal. 1:17b.

23b the Jews took counsel together to kill him:

24 but their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates also day and night that they might kill him:

25 but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.

**23b-24** Upon returning to Damascus Saul evidently became so earnestly insistent in his preaching that the Jews determined that the only solution to their embarrassment was the death of this heretic. A plot was laid for his life. Through someone the news leaked out and the word was quickly carried to Saul. It would seem

297. What one word describes the response of the Jews of Damascus to Saul's preaching?

298. Explain the meaning of the statement concerning the three year period

299. What did Saul do in Arabia? Why do you hold this opinion? What is spoken of in Galatians 1:18?

that the Jews knew of the fact that their plot had been discovered and so rather than to carry it out they watched carefully the city gates lest Saul should flee ere they could stay him. The guarding of the gates was with the sympathetic help of the governor.

25 The disciples soon knew of the guards at the gates and so came to Saul at night and effected his escape by letting him down over the wall in a basket (the same kind of basket spoken of in the feeding of the five thousand). Houses were built on the walls of many ancient cities. They were constructed in such a way that a portion of the house projected out over the edge of the wall. Such a construction would afford a perfect means of lowering a man as here described.

6. IN JERUSALEM. 9:26-29. Gal. 1:17b-19.

26 And when he was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

28 And he was with them going in and going out at Jerusalem,

29 preaching boldly in the name of the Lord: and he spake and disputed against the Grecian Jews; but they were seeking to kill him.

26 Saul's destination when he climbed out of the basket in the dark shadows of the Damascus wall was the city of Zion. How vastly different was his return trip. How great a change had taken place in these past three years.

What were the thoughts of this humbled Pharisee as he approached the city of Jerusalem, as he looked upon the city wherein he had been trained, where he had so zealously labored for the Law? He would come face to face with many of his old friends. What would they think? But away with these thoughts of retrospect! He must make himself known to the disciples and above all he must meet the apostles.

How poignant must have been the feelings of Saul as he was re-

300. Explain the connection of the plot laid for Saul's life and the watching of the gates by the Jews.

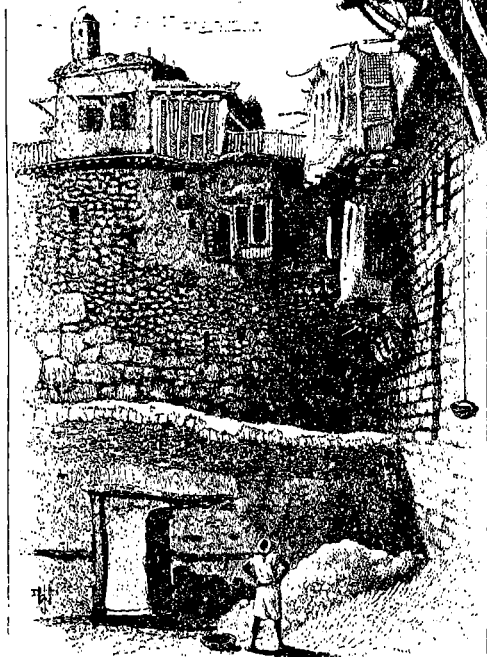
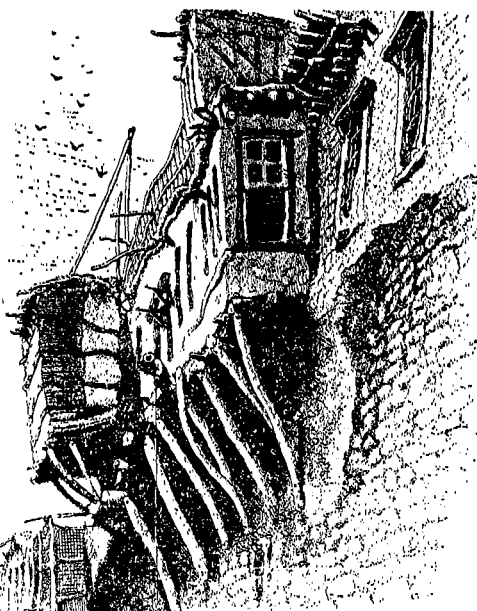
301. How could it be possible that Saul was let down over the wall in a basket?

302. Explain the meaning of the terms "his disciples" as found in 25a.

303. What thoughts do you imagine passed through the mind of Saul as he returned to Jerusalem from Damascus?

304. What response did Saul receive in Jerusalem from the disciples?

Over the wall in a basket. A Rabbi, a teacher, and leader of men. How can this be the will of God? Did one of these thoughts flash through his mind on his way down? Read Phil. 3:7, 8 for an answer.



There is no joy equal to that of seeing lost souls turn from sin to righteousness. Earthly joys fade. The mirth and laughter of today may give place to the deepest sorrow ere another sun. But the joy of rescuing the lost endures.

HOUSES ON THE CITY WALL,  
DAMASCUS.

On the south-east side, belonging to the Jewish quarter. The Bab Kisan, which is not far from this spot, is a now disused and closed-up gate. It stands on the site of a much more ancient one.

pulsed in his efforts to join himself to the disciples. But when he thought upon this matter was not this just the natural response considering the circumstances? Evidently the only news the believers in Jerusalem received was, that their chief persecutor had embraced the faith, but no sooner had he done this than he disappeared into Arabia. And now it had been three years since any word had come. Under such conditions the disciples in Jerusalem had some reasons for being skeptical.

**27-29** Luke says of Barnabas that "he was a good man" (11:24) and indeed his goodness is herein revealed. The heart of Barnabas was a heart of love for he "took not account" of evil. He believed when others doubted, he loved Saul with a love that expressed itself, while others were suspicious. Barnabas was willing not only to believe the story of Saul but was also willing himself to present him to the apostles, to plead before them that this man be accepted. Barnabas and Saul appeared before "the apostles." We know from Paul's account of this incident that they saw only Peter and James, the Lord's brother. The term **apostle** is here applied to the Lord's brother in the generic sense, i.e. "one sent." Any one who was sent could have been called an apostle (14:14) but only twelve were the ones sent from Jesus as witnesses. James was evidently considered as sent from the church in Jerusalem.

Three points in the defense made for Saul by Barnabas were: 1) Jesus had appeared to him. 2) Jesus had spoken to him. 3) In Damascus Saul had boldly preached Jesus. Saul was accepted and given acceptance by all the disciples and continued to labor for the space of fifteen days, speaking boldly in the name of Jesus. Saul went back to his own synagogue but received no better reception than he had given Stephen. As they had set a plot to kill Stephen, so they did with Saul.

#### 7. AT CAESAREA. 9:30a.

30 And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea,

**30a** When the plan for Saul's death was known he was taken under the protection of the brethren from Jerusalem and boarded a ship at Caesarea. From here he sailed to the port of his home town, Tarsus in Cilicia.

#### 8. IN TARSUS. 9:30b. Gal 1:21-24.

30b and sent him forth to Tarsus.

305. Who alleviated the situation? How did he do it?

306. Was James, the Lord's brother, one of the twelve? Why is he called an Apostle?

307. To what group did Saul preach in Jerusalem? Why?

308. How long did Saul stay in Jerusalem? When he left what did he do in Tarsus? Give proof.

**30b** What occurred at the meeting of Saul and his parents? We do not know but we cannot but wonder with a good deal of feeling. Whatever did occur it did not deter the apostle from evangelizing for we read that he "came into" the parts of both the provinces of Syria and Cilicia. From the future mention of disciples in these provinces we know he was preaching the Word.

## THE WORK OF PETER

9:31 — 11:18

### 1. AT JERUSALEM. 9:31.

**31** So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied.

**31** This is the intervening verse between the work of Saul and Peter. The historian gives us an insight into the state of the church in three provinces of Palestine. We have felt all the time that while we were following the labors of Philip, Peter and John, and Saul, that there were many others preaching the word and no doubt the events of their lives were just as interesting as were those of the men discussed. Luke here speaks of the church as one "ekklesia" called out body, located in the three above mentioned places. The coming of Saul, attended as it was by the intense persecution of the Jews, had interrupted the peace to some extent; now that he was gone the peace was restored. It is not to be concluded from this that the stirring caused by Saul was in any way harmful. Indeed it probably assisted in bringing peace, edification, and fear to the church. The "comfort of the Holy Spirit" spoken of in this verse is a subject worthy of some discussion.

### 2. IN LYDDA. 9:32-35.

**32** And it came to pass, as Peter went throughout all parts, he came down also to the saints that dwelt at Lydda.

**33** And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had kept his bed eight years; for he was palsied.

**34** And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ healeth thee: arise and make thy bed. And straightway he arose.

**35** And all that dwelt at Lydda and in Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

**32a** The increase and health of the church in Canaan probably prompted Peter to attempt an evangelistic tour of this territory. For whatever reason we now are told that the apostle goes on a trip

309. Who brought the gospel to Lydda before Peter arrived?

310. How do we know that Aeneas was well known in the town?

311. We have said that whether faith was present or not healings could be performed. Prove it.