

Acts 9 notes

Hallel Fellowship (<http://hallel.info>)

Jeff Quackenbush (jeff@hallel.info)

March 21 & April 25, 2009

Saul, bulldog of traditional Judaism of the time, gets his leash pulled in by his true master, Yeshua the Messiah. He gets new obedience training and becomes a valiant witness of “The Way” to Israelites and the nations. Meanwhile, Peter is traveling around the area, proclaiming Yeshua in words and miracles to the “saints.” Can we be “saints” too?

Acts 9:1–31 — Yeshua transform Sha’ul from Judiasm’s bulldog to the Messiah’s evangelist

Why is Sha’ul worried about believers in Damascus?

Why did Saul ask, “Who are you Lord?”

Sha’ul relates this first encounter with Yeshua in three places: Acts 9:3–19, 22:5–16 and 26:13–18

- Some have made accusations that Sha’ul’s *teshuvah* — his repentance or turning back to the true Way of God — was the result of some physical or psychological condition such as sunstroke, delirium, hallucination or seizure. They’ve made a lot of some of the differences in the three accounts Sha’ul gave for the event, as critics have made for minor differences between the four Gospels.
- Stern notes four common elements to the accounts that suggest Sha’ul’s witness isn’t impeachable¹:
 1. The light surrounded both Sha’ul and his companions.
 2. They all saw the light, but only Sha’ul saw Yeshua.
 3. They all heard some sort of sound, but only Sha’ul heard distinct words.
 4. All fell to the ground, but Sha’ul’s companions got up again.

Why didn’t Saul eat or drink for three days while blind (Acts 9:9, 11)?

- Sha’ul, whose name means “asked for,” was praying (v. 11).
- He saw a vision of a man named Ananias — from חנניה *khananyah*, “the LORD is gracious” — who would lay hands on him and remove the blindness (v. 12).

“inquire at the house of Iudas” (v. 11)

Some have claimed that the Gospels feature a treacherous disciple of Yeshua called Iudas because of hatred the early Christians had toward unbelieving Jews. Here, Judaism’s “bulldog” finds the Way in a “house of Iudas.” If there are any lessons conveyed by names, it could be that there were Yehudim who were blind — Yehudah Ish-Kariot and Sha’ul — and those who could see.

“there fell from his eyes something like scales” (v. 18)

Paul seems to reflect on his blindness when writing to the congregation in Corinth and compared it to those of ancient Israel who couldn’t stand the glory of God’s Way.

“But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry [*diakonia*] of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory. Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old [literally, “ancient”] covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” (2nd Cor. 3:7-18 NASB)

What’s the true account of Sha’ul’s life? — Acts 9:23-31 or Gal. 1:1 – 2:11

Stern suggests a reconciliation of Sha’ul’s account of his life in *Galatians* and Lucas’ accounts²:

1. Sha’ul came to faith on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:3-19) and stayed there with the Messianic Jewish believers briefly, evangelizing in the synagogues (Acts 9:20-22).
2. He immediately went off to Arabia (Gal. 1:17).
 - One does not know for how long, but according to v. 18 the upper limit has to be three years.
3. Afterwards he returned to Damascus, where he continued evangelizing Jewish people until some of them hatched a murder plot, so that he had to escape by being lowered over the city wall in a basket (Acts 9:23-25, 2nd Cor. 11:30-33).

¹ Stern, David H. “Acts 26:13–18.” *Jewish New Testament Commentary*. Jewish New Testament Publications Inc., 1996.

² *ibid.* “Galatians 1.”

- Alternatively, he escaped from Damascus, went to Arabia, and returned three years later for a less traumatic visit.
- 4. Only then did Sha'ul go up to Yerushalayim (Acts 9:26-30), but just for two weeks.
- 5. Sha'ul writes that he went to make Kefa's acquaintance (Gal. 1:18) but did not see any of the other emissaries except Ya'akov (v. 19).
 - However, Acts 9:27 says that bar-Nabba (Barnabas) led him "to the emissaries," not to only two of them.
 - A possible harmonization of these versions is that Sha'ul was introduced to all or most of the emissaries but spent no extended amount of time with them receiving instruction or discussing his version of the Good News (which is the focus here but not in Acts).
- 6. Next he went to Syria and Cilicia, specifically to Tarsus (Acts 9:30).
 - He remained there some years, until bar-Nabba brought him to be his assistant in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).
- 7. After some more time, bar-Nabba and Sha'ul went to Jerusalem with the Antioch congregation's contribution for the relief of the Judean brothers (Acts 11:29-30, 12:25).
 - Sha'ul's second visit there was only after 14 years (Gal. 2:1).
 - Perhaps he would not have gone then had it not been for a revelation (2:2).
- 8. During this visit, he and bar-Nabba (2:1) reached an agreement with the Jerusalem leaders on principles of Gentile evangelism, as described in 2:2-10.
- 9. After this, he and bar-Nabba evangelized the Galatians (Acts 13:2, 14:1-23).
 - He wrote *Galatians* from Antioch during the "some time" of Acts 14:28 or after the events of Acts 15:1-2.
 - The latter seems more likely in the light of Gal. 2:11-14.
 - At the time *Galatians* was written, the Yerushalayim Conference (Acts 15:3-29) had not yet happened.
 - The more specific directives concerning how the Gospel was to be presented to the nations were announced to the Galatians by Sha'ul only at a later time (Acts 15:36, 16:4-6).

Acts 9:32-43 — Peter visits "saints" in Ludda, heals Aeneas there, then resurrects Tavita in Ioppe

- Peter was traveling and preaching through Judea, Galilee and Samaria.
- He came to Ludda (Lydda).
 - It's located about nine miles east of the modern coastal city of Yafo (Japho in the "Old Testament" or Joppa in the "New Testament") and just southeast of Tel-Aviv. In the TaNaKh (i.e. Torah, Prophets and Writings) and today it's called Lod, but the Romans called it Diospolis after leveling it in 66 B.C.E.
 - Peter is visiting "saints."
 - Can any believer in Yeshua be a "saint"?
 - *Saints* in this passage is ἁγίους τοὺς *hagios tous*, which literally means "those who are holy" or "holy ones."
 - The word *saint* appears 68 times in the Bible:
 - Eight times in the TaNaKh *saint* is the translation for the Hebrew קדוש *kadosh* or קדיש *kaddish*.
 - "As for the **saints** [קדושים] who are in the earth, They are the **majestic ones** [אדירים, "lofty, wide, noble," Strong's 117] in whom is all my delight" (Psa 16:3).
 - The Septuagint (LXX, the Greek TaNaKh) uses *hagios* for these words.
 - A search for those Hebrew words along with *people*, *nation* and *one* shows more uses, referring to "the Holy One of Israel," i.e. the LORD, to Israel, or to heavenly messengers, a.k.a "angels."
 - Mankind was "created in the image of God" (Gen. 1:26-27).
 - Yeshua said that our resurrected bodies on the Day of the LORD will be made "like the angels" (Matt. 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:36).
 - In the Apostolic Writings, *hagios* is used 233 times, 60 times as *saint*.
 - "Holy Spirit," as in "πνεύματος ἁγίου" (Matt. 1:18)
 - "that which is holy," "τὸ ἅγιον" *tah hagion*, in Yeshua's instruction not to give it "to the dogs" or "throw your pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6)
 - "holy place," τόπος ἁγίω *topow hagiow* (Matt. 24:15)
 - "saints who have fallen asleep," κοιμημένων ἁγίων *kekoimemenoun hagion* (Matt. 27:52)
 - *Saint*, then, means one whom God has set apart for Himself.

- How does one attain “sainthood”?
 - The LORD makes us holy — sets us apart.

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you” ’” (Ex. 31:12-13; cf. Eze. 20:12).

“ ‘You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. You shall keep My statutes and practice them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you’ ” (Lev. 20:7-8).

 - Similar passages are Lev. 20:8, 21:8, 21:15, 21:23, 22:9, 22:16, 22:32; and Eze. 37:28.
 - “Righteous” is another term used for those who are God’s “saints.”
 - In the TaNaKh, Hebrew words based on צדק *tsedek* (Strong’s 6663) are translated as “righteous,” “just,” “justified,” “upright,” “ethical,” etc.

“Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous [צדיק *tsaddik*, Strong’s 6662], for I will not acquit [צדיק] the guilty” (Ex. 23:7).
 - This brings into sharp focus the meaning of “the righteous one [צדיק; δίκαιος *dikaïos*, Strong’s 1342 in LXX] will live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4; cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).
 - “For I am not ashamed of the [good news], for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness [δικαιοσύνη *dikaïosune*] of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’ ” (Rom 1:16-17)
 - The first half of the verse quoted from Hab. 2:4 is, “Behold, as for the proud one [עפלה *uppelah*, “swelled, uplifted, presumptuous,” 6075], his soul [נפש *nefesh*] is not right [ישר *yashar*, “to be straight, right, smooth,” 3474] within him.”
 - Put another way Hab. 2:4 says, the motivations of the presumptuous one are headed in the wrong direction, but the one who is blameless — “righteous” — before God trusts and acts on the leading of the LORD.
 - Thus, the leading of the LORD from “the gospel” — the news about the coming of His Messiah in Yeshua as the atonement offering to reconcile mankind and God — should point that righteous one to trust in the sufficiency of Yeshua’s atonement and the insufficiency of any other.
 - The only reason the righteous are “righteous” is their full trust in the LORD, Who made it clear that only through Him and His Servant would come “salvation” from the war between the Creator and the rebellious, the professedly self-sufficient creation.
 - “For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified [δικαιοθήσονται *dikaiothosuntai*].” (Rom. 2:12-13 NASB)
 - Peter comes across Aeneas, who had been bedridden from paralysis eight years, and raises him by saying, “Iesous Christ heals you.”
 - Can any believer say this to anyone who needs healing?
 - Not only those in Lod who saw Aeneas walking but also those from the plain of Sharon who heard about the healing “turned to the Lord.”
 - Sharon is a 30-mile-long, eight- to 15-mile-wide fertile plain between the sea and the hills of Yerushalayim.
 - It’s called laSharon, meaning “for straightness,” in Josh. 12:18.
- Disciples, presumably of Yeshua, in Ioppe (Yafo) heard Peter was in Lod and sent for him because Tavita (Tabitha) died.
 - *Tavita* in Hebrew and Aramaic means “gazelle,” which is the same meaning of her Greek name, *Dorkas*.
 - Many Israelites in the first century had Hebrew or Aramaic names as well as Greek ones.
 - She was a disciple and known as one continually “abounding with deeds of kindness and charity.”
 - She made χιτών *chitōn* (“undergarment,” 5509) and ἱμάτιον *himation* (“garment, cloak,” 2440).
 - Her dead body was washed and laid in an upper room.
 - Peter, without an audience, knelt, prayed and said to the body, “Ταβιθά, ἀνάστηθι!” *Tabitha anistethi*.
 - Eliyahu was the vehicle for a somewhat similar faith-building miracle in the raising of the dead son of a woman for whom he also had multiplied her flour during a famine (1st Ki. 17:8-24).
 - Yeshua raised the daughter of a synagogue official from the dead and resurrected a young man being carried out for burial with similar words (Matt. 9:18-31; Luke 7:12-17).

- He raised the girl in private, with just her parents watching.
- He raised the young man in a public place.
- Should miracles be done for many to see or done without an audience?
 - Yeshua did say that we are to let our “good works” shine like a light in the darkness, so that those who see them praise God (Matt. 5:14-16).
 - Yet in the same talk, Yeshua warns, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 6:1, see vv.1–18).