Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

**Why sort of “letters” do you think Paul sought from the high priest?**

Arrest warrants authorizing him to arrest Christians in Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem.

**Why did he want to go and arrest Christians in Damascus?**

Read Acts 8:3-4: "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word." He had already made havoc of the church in Jerusalem and scattered the Christians. He now wished to chase after, arrest and bring them back to the Jerusalem as prisoners.

**What is the name of the high priest?**

Given that he would have issued an official letter to introduce Saul, it would have been Caiaphas, the official high priest, rather than Annas, his father-in-law and former high priest who had been pushed out by the Roman but who still wielded power behind the scenes.

**What do you think the high priest thought of Saul?**

He most likely couldn't say enough nice things about Saul.

As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

**Had Saul been walking or riding a horse?**

Some have argued that he must have been riding a horse, reasoning that since Damascus is about 150 miles from Jerusalem, he would have wanted to ride a horse to get there faster. But such reasoning is not substantiated. The verses above simply state that "he fell to the ground" (Acts 9:4), not that he fell off a horse. Also, the men who journeyed with Saul "stood" (Acts 9:7) speechless, which means that they were on foot; since a group can travel only as fast as its slowest member, having had companions on foot refutes the notion that Saul would have been on horseback because he wanted to get to Damascus faster. And had there been a horse among them, it also would have been easier to put the blinded Saul on it and then lead the horse, which can see, by its rein, as opposed to leading a blinded man "by the hand" (Acts 9:8).

**Why didn’t “the men who journeyed with” (Acts 9:7) Saul fall to the ground as well?**

They did fall - "... I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice ..." (Acts 26:13-23).
14) - but apparently had gotten up and "stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one". (Acts 9:7)

**Who was speaking to Saul?**
Jesus: "I am Jesus." (Acts 9:5)

**Since Jesus ascended to heaven, did He come back for a visit before his second coming?**
No, a "light shone... from heaven" (Acts 9:3) just as Saul heard Jesus, who had earlier declared Himself, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), so the Lord was speaking from heaven.

**Is it accurate to say that Saul persecuted Jesus?**
Since Christians are the "Body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27), when Saul persecuted Christians, he was persecuting Jesus.

**How is this different today?**
It isn't. Anyone who persecutes a Christian is persecuting Jesus.

**What are "goads" (Acts 9:6)?**
A goad is a long rod with a sharp end that is used to prick an animal to move or to move in a different direction.

**What is Jesus saying by it being hard for Saul to "kick against the goads"?**
Kicking against the goads is what a stubborn animal does, thereby further hurting and infuriating itself. Jesus was saying that in the process of persecuting Christians, Saul was hurting and infuriating himself. Since he wasn't hurting himself physically, the Lord is most likely referring to the impact on Saul's conscience.

**How would persecuting Christians hurt Saul's conscience?**
Instead of behaving like criminals, the Christians he was arresting, imprisoning and killing most likely exuded grace, confidence and forgiveness. Stephen's words and demeanor as he was martyred may also have stayed with him. Saul may have even tried to overcome the effect on his conscience by persecuting more vehemently, with aggravating effect.

**Did Saul's travel companions hear Jesus as well?**
According to Acts 9:7, "And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one." But according to Acts 22:9, "And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me."

**Which account is correct?**
The root Greek word translated "hearing" in Acts 9:7 and "hear" in Acts 22:9 is *akouo*, which means "to hear" in the audible sense but also "to hear" in the sense of comprehending or understanding. Saul's travel companions audibly heard a voice (Acts 9:7) but did not comprehend it (Acts 22:9), so both accounts are correct.
Why did Saul call Jesus "Lord" in Acts 9:5 if he didn't know who Jesus was?

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated "LORD" is the unpronounceable Yhvh, a name which specifically refers to the God of the Bible (to make it pronounceable, Yhvh is referred to as Yahweh, Yahovah or even Jehovah after the addition of vowels). Since there is no equivalent in Greek, kyrios, the Greek word which means "master" or "lord" is used in the New Testament to refer to the God of the Bible. In Acts 9:5, however, Saul is using kyrios in its general sense.

What didn't Saul do during his first three days in Damascus?

He "neither ate nor drank." (Acts 9:9)

How do you think he felt and what do you think he did during those three days?

Saul had thought he was doing his best to serve God by arresting and killing Christians. Upon realizing that he in fact had been persecuting God and murdering innocent true followers, he was most likely deep in prayer of repentance.

ACTS 9:10-12 10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 12 And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.”

To whom did the Lord communicate "in a vision"?

To both Ananias (Acts 9:10) and Saul (Acts 9:12)

What is remarkable about the Lord’s directions to Ananias?

The Creator of the universe specifically indicating the name of a street and the house in one of His planets.

Why do you think the street was named "Straight"?

The "Straight Street" or Via Recta in Latin, was a straight east-west thoroughfare through Damascus built by the Greeks after the city came under Alexander the Great's rule. During the subsequent Roman rule, the Straight Street was widened and colonnades added to it.

What happened to the Straight Street since then?

It's still there and you can still see the evidence of the colonnades (click here).

ACTS 9:13-18 13 Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” 15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, 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 went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.
What is wrong with Ananias’s response to the Lord?
He is trying to inform God of what’s going on.

Did Saul’s many sufferings during his ministry for Jesus’ name come as a surprise to him?
No, God showed him, "how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake" (Acts 9:16) even before his ministry began.

How can this message of suffering in Jesus’ name in Christian ministry be reconciled with the health, wealth and prosperity that many modern preachers promise for those who follow Jesus?
The two messages cannot be reconciled. One is the truth from God Himself, and the other is a dangerous and deceitful half-truth from people interested in expanding, as well as justifying, their wealth and power.

What else did Jesus explain to Ananias?
That He had already appeared to Saul "on the road" (Acts 9:17) and that Saul was to "be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17)

ACTS 9:19-25  19 So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. 20 Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. 21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?” 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. 23 Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. 24 But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. 25 Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.

How might the disciples have felt meeting and spending time with Saul?
While rejoicing and marveling at the grace and the power of God to convert, it probably also felt a bit surreal to fellowship with the man who until days earlier had been their chief persecutor.

Who might have felt even more surreal?
The Jews who gave Saul the floor at the synagogue, expecting to hear him condemn the Christians, only to be "amazed" (Acts 9:21) and "confounded" (Acts 9:22) to have the table turned on them.

When did Saul began to preach and what did he share?
"Immediately" (Acts 9:20) and he shared as much as he knew by then - that Jesus "is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). No more and no less is required of Christians today as we grow in the knowledge of Jesus.

How many days were the "many days" after which the Jews plotted to kill him?
The Greek word translated "many" is hikanos, which also means "enough", "adequate" or "sufficient", so Acts 9:23 is expressing that the Jews plotted to kill Saul after enough time had passed, which was actually three years as recounted in Galatians 1:13-18: " 13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. 14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when it pleased God, who separated
me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days." And in the Hebrew context, "three years" could be as long as 36 months or as short as 367 days - the last day of the first year to the first day of the third year.

Where did Saul spend those "three years"?
If by "then" in Acts 9:18 Saul is referencing his return to Damascus, then he spent it in Damascus. But if he is referencing his conversion, then at least some and probably most of it was spent in "Arabia" (Galatians 1:17), presumably to be trained and equipped by the Holy Spirit for the ministry that lay ahead. Three elements tip the scale in favor of the latter scenario. Firstly, the Greek word translated "then" is epeita, which also means simply "later" or "afterwards". Secondly, it is doubtful that the Jews in Damascus would have put up with Saul's 'betrayal' of their cause and let him preach for three years under their noses. Thirdly, the thrust of Saul's point in Galatians 1:16-18 is that he didn't go to see Peter in Jerusalem right away.

Where is "Arabia"?
During Saul's time, "Arabia" (Galatians 1:17) referred to the kingdom of the Nabatean Arabs that stretched from Damascus to the Red Sea, covering parts of modern Syria, Jordan, Israel and Saudi Arabia. It was much smaller compared to modern Saudi Arabia.

Who were the "Jews" who "plotted to kill" Saul in Damascus as per Acts 9:23?
2 Corinthians 11:32-33 states that it wasn't just the Jews in Damascus, who apparently had the local Governor and his garrison on their side: "In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands."

ACTS 9:26-31 26 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. 29 And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. 30 When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. 31 Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

Why didn’t the disciples believe Saul to be a disciple?
The last time they saw him, he was arresting and killing Christians, and having escaped from Damascus in a "basket" (Acts 9:25) most likely on his own, he had come without a witness who could substantiate his claim of conversion.

Why isn't it surprising that "Barnabas" (Acts 9:27) was the one courageous one?
The name of this man of action literally meant, "Son of Encouragement": "And Joses, who was also
named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet." (Acts 4:36-37)

How long did Saul stay in Jerusalem?
"Fifteen days" (Galatians 1:18)

What did he do during those 15 days?
"So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists" (Acts 9:28-29), meaning the Hellenist Jews against whom Stephen, the first Christian martyr, had disputed.

Had they learned from their murderous error?
Apparently not, since they "attempted to kill" (Acts 9:29) Saul as well.

What did the church do about it?
"They brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus." (Acts 9:30)

Why Caesarea and Tarsus?
Tarsus is Saul's home town - "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people." (Acts 21:39) - so Saul probably had family in Tarsus with whom he could stay, away from the murderous plot on his life in Jerusalem, and also because Tarsus, as apparent later, was where the Lord wanted him to start his ministry. And Caesarea is the main port of Israel where they would have put Saul on a ship to Tarsus, some 250 miles to the north.

Is there a need to reconcile Acts 9:27 with Galatians 1:18-19?
Acts 9:27 states that Saul spoke to "apostles", while Galatians 1:18-19 states, "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother." Since Peter and James comprise "apostles" on their own, there is no need to reconcile the two passages.

The churches in which parts of Israel had peace?
Since all three provinces - Judea in the south, Galilee in the north and Samaria in between the two - are named in Acts 9:31, the churches across all of Israel had peace.

Why did the churches across the country have peace all of a sudden?
For one, God had turned the chief prosecutor of Christians into the chief missionary to the gentiles. For another, the Jewish rulers were busy dealing with Caligula, who had become the Roman Emperor upon Tiberius' death and was trying to erect a statue to himself in the Jerusalem temple.

ACTS 9:32-35 32 Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. 33 There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the
Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately. 35 So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Where is Lydda and Sharon?
Lydda is a town about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem and in the fertile plain of Sharon.

Why was Aeneas healed?
To restore his health, but also to make everyone in the region - "all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon" (Acts 9:35) - turn towards the Lord.

Did Peter heal Aeneas?
No, “Jesus the Christ” (Acts 9:34) healed Aeneas.

ACTS 9:36-39 36 At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. 37 But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. 39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

Where is Joppa?
It's on the Mediterranean Sea about 15 miles northwest of Lydda. Also called “Yafo” or “Jaffa” in Hebrew, Joppa is the nearest port to Jerusalem, about 40 miles to the southeast.

Who lay dead?
A woman "disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas" (Acts 9:36). Tabitha (Aramaic) and Dorcas, its Greek translation both mean "Gazelle".

What were some of her “charitable deeds”?
She made "tunics and garments" (Acts 9:39), which the widows most likely showed to Peter because she had given them to other people.

ACTS 9:40-43 40 But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. 41 Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. 43 So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

Of what is Peter raising Tabitha reminiscent?
Jesus raising Talitha in Mark 5:38-42: "Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. When He came in, He said to them, “Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping.” And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, “Talitha, cumi,” which is translated, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement."
What is the main difference between the two incidents?
Jesus raised the dead in His own power. Peter "prayed" (Acts 9:40) to the Lord to raise Tabitha. As such, both raisings were more similar than different: both dead people were raised by Jesus.

And what was the repercussion of raising Tabitha?
"Many believed on the Lord." (Acts 9:42)

With whom did Peter stay in Joppa?
"with Simon, a tanner." (Acts 9:43)

Why is that poignant and significant?
Peter would not have been predisposed to stay with a tanner, whom the Jewish law deemed unclean: "The carcass of any animal which divides the foot, but is not cloven-hoofed or does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Everyone who touches it shall be unclean. And whatever goes on its paws, among all kinds of animals that go on all fours, those are unclean to you. Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean until evening. Whoever carries any such carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. It is unclean to you." (Leviticus 11:26-28.) The Jews already considered gentiles to be unclean. By drawing Peter into the home of the dirtiest of the dirty, the Lord was breaking down barriers and preparing Peter as a vessel to pour out His blessing to the gentiles.