Acts 9
Saul's Conversion and Call to Service

CBCSD/LG

Review

1) A great persecution breaks out against the early church. (8:1)
2) Stephen was killed by stoning and Saul approved it. (8:1)
3) The church was scattered and most believers flee Jerusalem to neighboring cities as far as Damascus.
4) A devastating condition. Seems hopeless of their purposes.

Note on **Persecution** and suffering in a Christian's life:

1) It reveals a true believer's faith (Mark 4:16-17)
2) Trained to depend on God, not ourselves (2 Cor 1:8-9)
3) A test to refine us (1 Peter 4:12)

Acts 9: Themes

Persecution and Trials

Conversion and Sanctification

Christ's Intervention

Acts 9:1-2

1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.


Saul baptized
Damascus
Sidon
Tyre
Caesarea Philippi
Saul's Heavenly Vision
Ptolemais
Sea of Galilee
Tiberias
Sepphoris
Hippus
Nazareth
Gadara
Caesarea
Scythopolis
Bostra
River Jordan
Gerasa
Samaria-Sebaste
Joppa
Antipatris
Lydda
Philadelphia
Jericho
Jerusalem
Saul (Paul) sets out for Damascus
0 10 20 miles
0 10 20 30 km

Acts 9:3-7

3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him.

4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

5 And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.



Acts 9:8-9

8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Observation

threats and murder (v. 1) —Saul was not a benign or passive opponent of the gospel, but a bitter enemy.

Damascus (v. 2)—The capital of Syria, some sixty miles inland from the Mediterranean and 160 miles northeast of Jerusalem; apparently a large number of Jews had fled there to escape the persecution mentioned in 8:2.

the Way (v. 2)—a designation for Christianity from Jesus's description of Himself in John 14:6; used in Acts frequently (19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22)

a light shone around him(v. 3)—the first of six visions of Paul recorded in Acts (16:9; 18:9; 22:17; 23:11; 27:23); this was an appearance of Jesus Christ in glory, visible only to Saul

why are you persecuting Me? (v. 4)—Saul's persecution of Christians was tantamount to a direct attack on Christ.(also 22:1-21, 26:1-23)

Group Discussion – Understanding the text

1) What happened to Saul as he made his way to Damascus to round up Christians? (1 Cor. 9:1, 15:8)
2) How do you describe Saul's conversion experience? Is your own conversion experience similar or difference?
3) How does Saul change his view about himself after conversion? (1 Tim 1:15-16)
4) Can you describe Saul's personalities?

Warren Wiersbe on Saul

In spite of his great learning (Acts 26:24), Saul was spiritually blind (2 Cor. 3:12–18) and did not understand what the Old Testament really taught about the Messiah. Like many others of his countrymen, he stumbled over the Cross (1 Cor. 1:23) because he depended on his own righteousness and not on the righteousness of God (Rom. 9:30–10:13; Phil. 3:1–10). Many self-righteous religious people today do not see their need for a Saviour and resent it if you tell them they are sinners.

Quote from recent Tainan STM

November 3, 2026 –

Tainan Short-Term Mission:

Thanksgiving:

3. One of the prison's correctional officers expressed how the Gospel has the power to transform people's hearts. **He was deeply touched and expressed his gratitude for our ministry. We give all the glory to our Heavenly Father**!

Saul's personalities (John MacArthur)

1) Strength: Saul was a gifted natural leader, with strong will power. He was a man of strong convictions, a self-starter, bold, a master at using his time and talents, a motivated individual, and a profoundly gifted thinker and speaker.
2) Weakness: He is cruel, restless with an aggressive spirit, rough and harsh treatment of people, prideful.

God's works on Saul

1) First, He took Saul's natural strengths and refined them.
2) "The Holy Spirit also eliminated undesirable characteristics and replaced them with desirable ones. He replaced Paul's cruel hatred with love; his restless, aggressive spirit with peace; his rough, hard-nosed treatment of people with gentleness; his pride with humility. "Only the Spirit of God can so thoroughly sanctify a life." — John MacArthur.

Discussion - Reflecting on the Text

1) What natural strengths does God want to strengthen and use in your life?
2) What undesirable qualities do you think the Lord wants to replace? What is necessary on your part for this process of sanctification to proceed?
3) Think of 3 undesired characters in your life that you want God to change thru His sanctification process. Pray and act.

How to find out your natural strength

1) The “No Big Deal” Test.
2) The “Flow State”: Notice the activities where you completely lose track of time.
3) What people ask you for.
4) The 3 person Rule: Ask 3 trusted people in work life and 3 in personal life. “What do you think my top strengths are?

How do you proceed to refine your strength?

Acts 9:10-16

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord
said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”
11 And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called
Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus
named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a
vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so
that he might regain his sight.” 13 But Ananias answered, “Lord, I
have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has
done to your saints at 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 instrument of mine to
carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of
Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake
of my name.”

Acts 9:17-21

17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

19 and taking food, he was strengthened.

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name?

Observation

Ananias (v. 10)—one of the leaders of the Damascus church and thus one of Saul's targets. Ananias obeys and did not delay the mission.

Tarsus (v. 11)—birthplace of Saul; a key commercial and educational center near the border of Asia Minor and Syria

chosen instrument (vessel) (v. 15)—literally, "a vessel of election"; God selected Paul to convey His grace to all men

How much he must suffer (v.16) - do not be surprised by the suffering happens to Christians. Jesus told us the same.

be filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 17)—Saul was empowered for service; he received the Spirit without any apostles being present because Christ personally chose him and because he was a Jew (and the inclusion of Jews in the church had already been established at Pentecost).

He is the Son of God (v. 20) —the content of Paul's lifelong message. Paul's conversion is radical. From persecutor to proclaimer.

after many days were past (v. 23)—Galatians 1:17–18 gives this number as three years, during which time Paul ministered in Nabatean Arabia


TARSUS
ANTIOCH
Cyprus
Mediterranean Sea
DAMASCUS
CAESAREA
JERUSALEM
Dead
Sea
Arabia
Sinai

ss

Explore

1) Consider the way in which Saul met Christ. Who initiate his calling? (Gal 1:15)
2) How does Saul's conversion encourage us regarding stubborn non-believers around us? (1 Tim 1:15-16)
3) Read 9:15-16 How do you view suffering in light of this verse?

C.S. Lewis – Surprised by Joy

C. S. Lewis describes how the Lord persistently “closed in on” him. “You must picture me alone. . . night after night, feeling . . . the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me . . . I gave in and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed; perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.” As influential as C. S. Lewis's conversion has been, John Stott rightly notes that “Saul's . . . is the most famous conversion in church history.”

Application

1) Salvation is the sovereign work of God. Most of us did not seek God but God searches him/her out. Say a thanksgiving prayer for your salvation.
2) No matter how worst a sinner is, God can save. Name someone now and pray for him or her salvation.
3) Persecution and suffering can be found throughout church history. Do not be surprised by it. Pray for persecuted churches especially in Nigeria, Sudan etc.

Acts 9:23-31

23 When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.


SAUL'S EARLY YEARS
Biblewhere
Mediterranean Sea
Saul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus
Damascus
Caesarea Philippi
Tyre
Saul returns to Tarsus for ten years
Ptolemais
Bethsaida
Tiberias
Caesarea
Sebaste
Saul's family moves from Tarsus to Jerusalem
Jerusalem
Jericho
Saul studies under Gamaliel
A R A B I A
Saul in Arabia for three years
Possible visit to region of Mt. Sinai
Mt. Sinai (Jebel Musa)
Tarsus to Jerusalem
Jerusalem to Damascus
Damascus to Arabia
Arabia to Jerusalem
Jerusalem to Tarsus
0 20 40 miles
0 25 50 km
© Carta, Jerusalem

Jesus Still Turns Things Around

Final Remarks: v31 stated one of the main purpose of this episode. The church now has peace and comforted. The worst enemy is neutralized. Not only that, Saul joined force with the church because of Jesus' intervention.

What about our current situation? Hopeless? Fatalistic? Personal or global conflicts. Evil seems to triumph everywhere. Countries closed their doors to the gospel. Christians are being persecuted.

Jesus still turns things around. Full of surprise.

Jesus Still Turns Things Around

Saul:

- An enemy of God became a servant of God
- A hunter is now being hunted
- A persecutor became a preacher and proclaimer of the gospel. “Jesus is the son of God”

God is still acting with many surprises around us and in history.

Final words

Final verse: 1 Cor. 1:19-20

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

Millions of individuals have left Islam to embrace Christianity across the globe, driven by personal spiritual experiences, disillusionment with conflict, and increased access to information. Reports from missions and Christian broadcast networks indicate that millions of Muslims have converted in recent years, particularly in countries like Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey. (Global Christian Relief, 6/9/25)

Summary:

1) Persecution and Trials

2) **God's sovereign work of Conversion and Sanctification**

3) Christ's Intervention