

Bible Study Series: The Book of Acts
"Signs of a Healthy Church"



Switching Sides - Acts 9:1-25
A Cataclysmic Conversion in the 1st Century Church
(Part 3)

Topics:

- ☐ Reflection Questions
- ☐ Important Emphasis
- ☐ Outline
- ☐ Key Terms
- ☐ Introduction
- ☐ Exploring the Text
- ☐ Understanding the Text
- ☐ Life Application

Reflection Questions

A. Describe three characteristics of the most intimidating person you have ever met?

B. Describe a time when you had a change of heart about something after previously being unyielding and passionately stubborn about it; and what made you change your mind?

C. **Briefly describe a time when you were forced to go and rescue, give aid, support, or comfort to someone who had once bullied you, or tormented you physically or mentally, or unjustly defamed you.**

D. After you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, did your family and friends treat you differently? Briefly explain.

Important Emphasis

Fierce opposition of Christ

Formally obtained letters for the Cruel Crusade

Flashing opportunity brought about a Change

For Luke Paul will become the model par excellence of faithfulness in the face of opposition and persecution.

A Key miracle: the complete turnaround of a persecutor

Prosecuted: The People of the Way Acts 18:24-25; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14 and Ps. 5:8; 18:30 Isaiah 40:3-5 Luke 3:4-6. This May reflect competing claims for being the authentic keepers of Torah among the Jewish sects. This term has been overshadowed by the term Christian or messianist.

Confrontation with Christ

- **He is going to Let you know who He is.**
- **He exposes where we are in error.**
- **He doesn't change his direction. (He changes the reason he arises)**
- **He must heed to the directions.**

Lasting Encounter with Christ

- **Perception- The way Saul sees things has changed. The encounter was extraordinary.**
- **Presence- Saul discerns the presence of the Lord but these individuals with him didn't have the same encounter.**
- **Purging of Saul- The fasting from food and water! Matthew 6:17**

Paul's encounter Acts 9

Peter's encounter Acts 10:10-16

We must go blind (in our fleshly nature) before we really have the opportunity to see the gospel clearly

Accepting of the Alterations in the Kingdom

- **Memories can hinder moving forward.**
- **Minister to a Man that is killing you.**
- **Manifested from Meaningful Prayers.**

Chosen instruments of the Kingdom

- Talking about Saul
- Torture by Saul
- Touch within Saul
- Tough for Saul
- Turning over of Saul

Outline**A. Saul's vendetta [vengeance] against the saints of God (9:1–2)**

1. *His hatred for the Jerusalem Christians* (9:1)
2. *His hatred for the Damascus Christians* (9:2): Saul sets out to persecute believers in Damascus.

B. Saul's vision of the Son of God (9:3–9)

1. *The revelation* (9:3–6)
 - a. What he sees (9:3): He sees a brilliant and blinding light from heaven.
 - b. What he hears (9:4–6): Jesus says to him, "Why are you persecuting me?"
2. *The results* (9:7–9): Saul's traveling companions lead him into Damascus blind, and he consumes neither food nor water for the next three days.

C. Saul's visitation by the servant of God (9:10–25)

1. *Events preceding this visit* (9:10–16): God appears to a believer in Damascus named Ananias.
 - a. The revelation (9:10–12): God instructs Ananias to go and minister to Saul.
 - b. The reluctance (9:13–14): Knowing Saul's evil past, Ananias is afraid to go.
 - c. The reassurance (9:15–16): God assures Ananias that Saul is now a believer.
2. *Events during this visit* (9:17–19): Ananias lays hands on Saul, with a twofold result.
 - a. Saul is healed of his blindness (9:17a, 18a).
 - b. Saul is filled with the Spirit (9:17b, 18b–19).
3. *Events following this visit* (9:20–25)
 - a. Saul's evangelism in Damascus (9:20–22): He preaches Christ in all the synagogues.
 - b. Saul's escape from Damascus (9:23–25): Upon hearing of a plot against him, Saul leaves for Jerusalem.

Key Terms

☐ Ananias of Damascus
☐ Antioch
☐ Blind
☐ Christians
☐ Courage
☐ Damascus
☐ Devout
☐ Disciple
☐ Faithfulness
☐ Followers of The Way
☐ Heretics

☐ Jerusalem
☐ Jesus
☐ Judea
☐ Laying on of Hands
☐ Light
☐ Lord
☐ Persecution
☐ Samaria
☐ Son of God
☐ Synagogues
☐ Threats

INTRODUCTION

Acts 1:8 seems to be a concise outline for the entire book. Chapters 1–7 describe the gospel being preached in Jerusalem. Chapter 8 shows believers, under threat of persecution, taking the Good News of Jesus to Judea and Samaria. Chapter 9 records a monumental event in the history of the church—the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Saul (later known as Paul) would be God’s apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:8; Ephesians 3:8). He would lead the church in spreading Christianity “to the ends of the earth” (1:8). Therefore Paul, more than any other person, figures prominently in chapters 10–28.

EXPLORING THE TEXT – Acts 9:1-2

¹Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord’s followers. So he went to the high priest. ²He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

A. Saul’s Vendetta [Vengeance] Against The Saints Of God (9:1–2)

1. **His hatred** for the Jerusalem Christians (9:1)
2. **His hatred** for the Damascus Christians (9:2):
Saul sets out to persecute believers in Damascus

9:1-2 Saul (later called Paul, the equivalent of “Saul” in Greek), first mentioned as a participant in the stoning of Stephen (see **Acts 7:58; 8:1**), was so zealous for his Jewish beliefs that he began a **persecution** campaign against all who believed in Christ, all who were **followers** of the **Way** (see Paul’s testimony in Philippians 3:6). This name implied “the way of the Lord” or “the way of salvation.”

The **letters** requested by Saul would not only introduce him, but they would provide him with the high priest’s authorization to seize followers of Christ and bring them back to Jerusalem. Most **synagogues** in Syria probably recognized this right of extradition. Not only was Saul going to pursue them, he also was going to arrest both men and women and bring them back in chains.

Q - Why would the Jews in Jerusalem want to persecute Christians as far away as Damascus?

There are several possibilities: (1) to seize the Christians who had fled; (2) to prevent the spread of Christianity to other major cities; and (3) to keep the Christians from causing any trouble with Rome.

³As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” ⁵“Who are you, lord?” Saul asked. And the voice replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!” ⁶Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” ⁷The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone’s voice but saw no one! ⁸Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. ⁹He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

B. Saul's vision of the Son of God (9:3–9)

1. *The revelation* (9:3–6)
 - a. What he sees (9:3): He sees a brilliant and blinding light from heaven.
 - b. What he hears (9:4–6): Jesus says to him, “Why are you persecuting me?”
2. *The results* (9:7–9): Saul's traveling companions lead him into Damascus blind, and he consumes neither food nor water for the next three days.

9:3 Damascus, a key commercial city, was located about 175 miles northeast of Jerusalem in the Roman province of Syria. Several trade routes linked Damascus to other cities throughout the Roman world. Damascus was one of the ten cities known as the Ten Towns (see **Mark 5:20; 7:31**). Saul may have thought that by stamping out Christianity in Damascus, he could prevent its spread to other areas.

Nearing his destination, at about noon, when the sun was at its full height (see **22:6; 26:13**), Saul suddenly found himself awash in a **brilliant light**. Though the text does not overtly state that Saul saw Christ, that fact is implied, since seeing the resurrected Lord was a requirement of New Testament apostleship (see **1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8**). Also, the testimonies of Ananias (**9:17**) and Barnabas (**9:27**) confirm an eyewitness encounter.

9:4-5 Not only did Saul witness the brilliant glory of the Lord, but he also heard the voice of Jesus Christ. (For the rest of what Jesus said, see Acts 22:8, 10, 17, 21; 26:15-18.) Saul thought he was pursuing **heretics**, but according to the voice, his actions were equivalent to attacking Jesus himself—“I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting.” Anyone who **persecutes believers** today is also guilty of **persecuting Jesus** (see **Matthew 25:40, 45**) because believers are the body of Christ on earth. This is a powerful statement about the union that exists between Christ and his church.

As he lay there in the dust, Saul must have been reeling from the realization that Jesus, the crucified founder of this detested sect, had been **resurrected** by God and **exalted** in divine glory. Saul was not serving God, as he had thought, but opposing him!

9:6 According to Paul's own testimony in **26:16-18**, Christ gave him, at this moment, a brief preview of his future as an **apostle** to the **Gentiles**. Further details would come once he made his way into the city of Damascus.

9:7 Those accompanying Saul heard the sound of someone's voice and saw some kind of light (**22:9**), but they didn't understand the full significance of this encounter. They saw no one, nor had they heard the specific words spoken to Saul (**26:14**).

9:8-9 Saul was temporarily blinded by this revelation (an event with Old Testament precedence—see Genesis 19:11; 2 Kings 6:17-20), so his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. Saul's subsequent fast (going without food and water) was most likely motivated by shock as he tried to ponder the full significance of his experience. Typically, fasting indicated a period of mourning or repentance.

Saul certainly had a lot to think about during those **three days**. He realized that despite his zeal for God, his recent activity of **arresting** Christians had been in direct opposition to God—otherwise, he would not have received this rebuke. Suddenly, all that Saul had believed was being torn down and replaced with a new truth—the very **truth** that he had been seeking to **extinguish**.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. What was Saul doing against the Lord's disciples? (9:1-2)

Saul persecuted them, by arresting them and taking them back to Jerusalem in chains.

2. What was "the Way?" (9:2)

The Way of Salvation by becoming followers of Jesus.

3. What happened to Saul as he approached Damascus? (9:3-6)

Saul was covered with a light from heaven, which caused him to fall to the ground. Saul had a conversation with the resurrected Jesus who accused Paul of persecuting Him. Saul was blinded and had to be led by the hand to Damascus where he remained for three days fasting.

4. In persecuting the church, whom was Saul really attacking? (9:5)

Saul attacked the followers of the Way, but in doing so, he was attacking Jesus.

5. What did the resurrected Lord Jesus order Saul to do? (9:6)

The resurrected Lord Jesus ordered Saul to go into the city to be told what he must do.

6. What did Saul's traveling companions experience when Saul met the risen Christ? (9:7)

Saul's traveling companions only heard the sound of a voice, but did not distinguish the exact words, nor did they see anyone.

7. How did Saul get to Damascus after his meeting with the Lord? (9:8)

Saul's companions led him by the hand into Damascus.

8. How many days did Saul stay in Damascus after he was brought there? (9:9)

Saul remained in Damascus for three days.

EXPLORING THE TEXT (9:10-16)

¹⁰ Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. ¹¹ The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. ¹² I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again." ¹³ "But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers^[c] in Jerusalem! ¹⁴ And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is

my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel.¹⁶ And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

C. Saul's Visitation By The Servant Of God (9:10–16)

1. **Events preceding this visit** (9:10–16): God appears to a believer in Damascus named Ananias.
 - a. The revelation (9:10–12): God instructs Ananias to go and minister to Saul.
 - b. The reluctance (9:13–14): Knowing Saul's evil past, Ananias is afraid to go.
 - c. The reassurance (9:15–16): God assures Ananias that Saul is now a believer.

9:10-12 As Saul waited for further directions, the Lord began speaking to **Ananias**, a Jew who had become a **believer** in Christ. Ananias responded to the call of God. The meeting between Saul and Ananias was divinely arranged. **Straight Street** was and still is one of the main thoroughfares of Damascus. Ananias was directed to the street and to the house of Judas. The Lord gave specific instructions to Ananias about where to go and for whom to look; in a separate vision, he told Saul to expect Ananias's arrival. Such divine revelation with separate individuals having similar visions would be repeated again in **10:1-23** (Cornelius and Peter).

9:13-14 Ananias was understandably shaken by the Lord's command to go and find Saul of Tarsus. Christians wanted to stay far away from Saul. His reputation as an enemy of the church was well documented, and the intent of this particular mission to Damascus was widely known. Ananias knew that Saul had been **authorized** by the leading priests to arrest every believer in Damascus. Fearful of what might happen, Ananias began to protest. Despite his protests, however, Ananias was up to the task.

9:15-16 Ananias's protest was met with a divine statement that Saul was God's chosen **instrument**. What irony that the most zealous Jew and most anti-Gentile would be the chosen **witness** to take God's message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. For the rest of his life, Saul marveled that he would be the recipient of such mercy and grace, as well as be the appointee for such a noble task. Saul, who had caused horrible suffering for so many Christians, would find that he, too, must **suffer**. The remainder of the book of Acts, as well as the many letters that Saul wrote, chronicle the words of this verse: Saul would find himself witnessing for Christ in front of Gentile audiences, Jewish audiences, and even kings. He also would suffer severely for his faith.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT (9:10-16)

9. Who was Ananias? (9:10)

Ananias was a believer in Damascus.

10. What did the Lord instruct Ananias to do? (9:10-12)

Ananias was instructed by the Lord to go over to Straight Street to the house of Judas, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, and lay hands on him so he could see again.

11. Why was Ananias reluctant to do as the Lord asked? (9:13-14)

Ananias was reluctant to do what the Lord asked because he had heard many people talk about terrible things that Saul had done to believers in Jerusalem. Ananias also said that Saul was authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who called upon the name of Jesus.

12. How did God persuade Ananias that it was all right to go to Saul? (9:15-16)

Jesus persuaded Ananias to go to Saul by telling him that Saul was Jesus' chosen instrument to take the Gospel message to the Gentiles, to kings, and to the people of Israel.

13. To what service had Saul been called? (9:15-16)

Saul was designated as Jesus' "chosen instrument (vessel KJV), or Apostle to the Gentiles (1 Timothy 2:7).

EXPLORING THE TEXT (9:17-20)

¹⁷ So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. ¹⁹ Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days. ²⁰ And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!" ²¹ All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?" ²² Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. ²³ After a while some of the Jews plotted together to kill him. ²⁴ They were watching for him day and night at the city gate so they could murder him, but Saul was told about their plot. ²⁵ So during the night, some of the other believers^[a] lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

2. **Events during this visit** (9:17–19): Ananias lays hands on Saul, with a twofold result.

- a. Saul is healed of his blindness (9:17a, 18a).
- b. Saul is filled with the Spirit (9:17b, 18b–19).

3. **Events following this visit** (9:20–25)

- a. Saul's evangelism in Damascus (9:20–22): He preaches Christ in all the synagogues.
- b. Saul's escape from Damascus (9:23–25): Upon hearing of a plot against him, Saul leaves for Jerusalem.

9:17-19a Ananias's actions fulfilled at least two purposes. First, he functioned almost in a **prophetic** role, serving as God's confirming mouthpiece in the commissioning of the great apostle. Second, his visit served as a ministry of _____. Saul must have been encouraged when he heard Ananias greet him as brother. Ananias told Saul that Jesus had sent him so that Saul could get his sight back and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Evidently, the _____ filled Saul when he received his sight and was baptized. Upon the conclusion of this experience, something like

scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Saul was baptized, presumably by Ananias, and he ended his three-day fast (9:9).

9:19b-20 Saul obeyed his new calling immediately, for immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues. Saul could do this so soon after his conversion because his experience on the road to Damascus had been unmistakable. Saul knew that Jesus was alive, Jesus was the _____ of _____, and Jesus was the _____.

9:21 The change in Saul caused his hearers to be amazed. They had expected Saul to show up and begin arresting followers of Jesus for they knew that was why he had come to Damascus in the first place. Yet here was this _____ of Christianity preaching the Christian message! Surely these Jews made this information known to their leaders back in Jerusalem (9:23).

9:22 Saul's preaching was _____, filled with proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. The word "proofs" as used here means "to put together." Essentially, what Saul was doing was taking Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah and putting them together with the facts of Jesus' life, thus proving that Jesus was the one to whom the Scriptures pointed.

9:23-25 According to **Galatians 1:17-18**, Saul left Damascus and traveled to Arabia, the desert region just southeast of Damascus, where he lived for three years. It is unclear whether his three-year stay occurred between verses 22 and 23 or between verses 25 and 26. Some commentators say that after a while could mean a long period of time. They suggest that when Saul returned to Damascus, the governor under Aretas ordered his arrest (**2 Corinthians 11:32**) in an effort to keep peace with influential Jews. The other possibility is that Saul's night escape occurred during his first stay in Damascus, just after his conversion, when the Pharisees were especially upset over his _____ [SWITCHING SIDES!] from their ranks. He would have fled to Arabia to spend time alone with God and to let the Jewish religious leaders cool down.

Regardless of which theory is correct, there was a period of at least three years between Saul's conversion (9:3-6) and his trip to Jerusalem (9:26). What is clear is that Saul's preaching had made such headlines that the Jewish leaders decided to kill him. But God had plans for Saul, and so he protected him. The other believers, too, convinced of Saul's transformed life, were willing to help him escape the city. They let him down in a large basket through an opening in the city wall so that he could bypass the city gate, where people were watching for him in order to murder him. In some of the ancient walled cities, houses were built right on the city walls (see Joshua 2:15). It would not have been too difficult, therefore, for one of the believers who lived in such a house to use a window in his home for Saul's escape.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

14. How did Ananias do the Lord's bidding? (9:17)

15. What did Saul do when his vision returned? (9:18-19)

16. How soon did Saul's transformation from a persecutor of the Saints and the Son to a Preacher of the Savior take place? (9:20)

17. How was Saul's transformation received by some of the Jews? (9:23-25)

LIFE APPLICATION

- What will you do to build your confidence in sharing the gospel this week?

- Think of the names of three (3) people to whom you will witness to this week.
