



## Acts Chapter 9:1-31

### Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

#### Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

#### Further Study: with your small group or on your own

Complete with your small group if you are in one; or complete on your own, spending time with God.

Song for the week: I've Witnessed It - Jenn Johnson

Song links: <https://youtu.be/iHYpWwTJ0Ug?si=SGpZuab9oj-iM7JC>

**NOTE:** Please take the next two weeks to go through this study. If you are meeting with your small group weekly, consider using one week to go through "Further Study" together and the second week to share your conversion stories (see "Putting it into practice").

**Read Acts 9:1-31.** Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.

#### Personal Reflection

Saul's conversion story is considered by many to be the best documented conversion story in the Bible. It is written about three times in Acts as well as in Galatians and 1 Corinthians. *Optional, read these verses: Acts 22:1-21, Acts 26:1-23, Galatians 1:11-24, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11*

Saul was a circumcised Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin. He was born in Tarsus, located in modern-day Mersin, Turkey. Tarsus was not an ordinary place; it was a "university town" where education was valued and commercial activity was widespread (Cultural Background Study Bible). Being born in Tarsus and speaking Greek made him a Grecian (Hellenist). He was also a Pharisee who studied under Gamaliel.

There were six Gamaliels in Palestine during the first 5 centuries, the one Saul studied under was Gamaliel 1, called "the Elder." Gamaliel held the title of Nasi, which means Prince. He studied Greek philosophy in addition to Jewish law.

Together, Gamaliel and Saul were part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council that upheld Jewish law and tradition and which put believers in Jesus in prison and killed them. (Jewish Learning and Britannica) *Optional, read these verses: Philippians 3:3-6, Acts 21:39, Acts 22:3, Acts 26:10*

Saul had an education in Jewish law and history as well as Greek philosophy. How might these have hindered him from believing in Jesus?

What things are we taught today which hinder some from believing in Jesus?

What things in today's society might pull you away from God's desires for you?

Saul was looking for any who were part of “the Way.” Acts 9:2 is the first time that “the Way” was used as a synonym for living as a disciple of Jesus. In Acts 11:26 the term Christian first appeared as another synonym but throughout Acts, “the Way” continued to be used.

Read John 14:6. Why might the early followers of Jesus have chosen this term?

Saul was on his way to Damascus where there were more than 20,000 Jewish residents. It is located in Syria and is believed to be the oldest continuously inhabited ancient city. It is approximately 135 miles from Jerusalem and was a commercial network linked to both water transportation and caravan routes going north to Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia and Arabia. “If ‘the Way’ of Christianity flourished in Damascus, it would quickly reach all those other places (Cultural Background Study Bible).”

When Saul saw the light he fell to the ground then heard a voice - an audible voice that the others heard, too. Given what he knew from the Old Testament, he assumed correctly that it was God’s voice speaking to him, just as God had spoken to Cain, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Samuel. *Optional, read these verses: Genesis 4:3-10, Genesis 6:11-22, Genesis 12:1, 1 Samuel 3:10-14*

Saul thought he was doing what was right in God’s eyes, eliminating believers in Jesus. Instead he was persecuting God’s Son. He was educated, and while education is not a bad thing, as Saul sought the law, he missed the Messiah.

Saul asked “Who are you, Lord?” Contemplate this question. How would you answer who God is - who Jesus is? Where is there evidence in your life that you know who He is?

Ananias also heard from Jesus, but in a vision. Like Saul, he answered Jesus, but unlike Saul, he responded “Yes, Lord.” He had a submissive response.

At this point, which person do you relate to more - the law following, questioning Saul or the faith responding Ananias?

Talk with the Holy Spirit about any of the places in your life where seeking questions and answers are easier than faith. Ask Him to guide you to answers and build your faith.

Jesus chose the 12 disciples who He designated apostles (apostle means “one who is sent out by God”). *Optional, read these verses: Luke 6:12-16*

Read Acts 1:16-26. Judas had betrayed Jesus and was dead. Who decided who would replace Judas? How was the decision made?

In Acts 9:15 Jesus told Ananias that Saul was who He chose to proclaim His name to the Gentiles. Once Ananias placed his hands on Saul and prayed, scales fell off Saul’s eyes, he was baptized and he began to preach the gospel in the synagogues.

Saul was the 12th apostle chosen by Jesus to replace Judas. He later wrote that he was not sent by men but called and sent by God.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-11. How does Paul’s letter to Corinth confirm his calling to be an apostle was by Jesus? *Optional, read these verses: Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1, Galatians 1:12*

The 11 disciples decided to appoint a 12th disciple to become an apostle with them. They were not asked by God to do so, instead they moved ahead assuming what Jesus would want. In God's right time, Jesus appointed Saul.

Where do you struggle with making decisions now instead of waiting on God?

We also sometimes have scales that need to fall off; scales formed from life's experiences, things we have been taught, things we fear ... These keep us from living into what God is calling us to. Where might you have scales that need to fall off?

Listen for God's voice, it always aligns with His Word in the Bible. Identify where you are being deceived by the enemy. Are there any Bible verses that you can memorize to remind you of God's truth?

It was no wonder that people were afraid of Saul. His reputation preceded him. Eventually he had to escape Damascus as people were plotting to kill him. In Jerusalem he tried to join the other disciples but they were also afraid of him.

Joseph was first mentioned in Acts 4:32-40. He is also called Barnabas which means "son of encouragement." He was the one who had sold a field and brought the money to the apostles. He appeared again, this time with Saul, to testify to Saul's story.

Based on these two stories, how did Barnabas live up to his nickname?

Initially, Saul moved freely about Jerusalem. Educated as a Grecian, he was able to connect with the other Greek speaking Jews.

God used Saul's background as a Grecian to help him explain the gospel, "although the gospel is not "culture bound," it must be presented in a way that people can understand (Life with God Bible)."

What in your background is God using as an opening to tell others about Jesus?

**Putting it into practice:** Grecian thought during this time was that "religious vocation was based on divine manifestation (Life with God Bible)." Saul's story as written by Luke has the five parts of Grecian conversion stories.

1. Context (Acts 9:1-2)
2. Catalysts (Acts 9:3-6)
3. Counterforce (Acts 9:7-9)
4. Conversion (Acts 9:18-19)
5. Confirmation of Genuineness (Acts 9:19-22)

Take some time to consider your conversion story using the five parts. What is your context, catalysts, counterforce, conversion and confirmation of genuineness?

## **Further Study - with your small group or on your own**

**Consider sharing your conversion stories** using the five parts used by the Grecians either this week or next week.

“The Way” was a synonym for living out being disciples of Jesus.

Read Hebrews 10:19-25. There are at least 5 things mentioned in living the Way in these verses. What are they? How can you live them out individually and as a small group?

In Acts 9:3-5, Jesus' question was personal. Jesus didn't say, “Saul, why are you persecuting my church?” He said, “Why are you persecuting me?”

Read Matthew 25:31-45. What did Jesus say we should do for Him in these verses?

How did what Jesus said in Matthew 25 align with what Jesus said to Saul?

Saul did not one day become Paul. He was not renamed by God after his conversion. While Joseph was called Baranabus by the disciples, there is no indication that the disciples renamed Saul. Acts 13:9 simply says Saul was also called Paul.

Saul's name is similar to the word saulos. “In the Greek world, the word saulos carried a negative connotation when it came to males and meant something like “prancing.” It seems likely that someone in Antioch gave Saul some valuable advice before he went out among the peoples of the Roman world. Calling oneself “Prancer” when standing before the likes of philosophers and Roman governors would probably not generate a great first impression (Biblical Archaeology).”

While not the most important part of our witness, what names or nicknames do people have today that could be distracting from their witness to the gospel?

After answering Jesus, Ananias talked with Him, recounting what he knew and why God's ask made little sense to him. He continued in conversation, listening to God's reply then responded with his “yes” that went from hearing to doing.

What can you learn from the conversation that Ananias had with God?

Where might you be called to go from hearing to doing?

Is there anything from this week's personal reflection time which you would like to discuss more with your small group?