

# THE ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

### *Chapter 9:1 – 31* A persecutor is converted

\*Why is the story of Saul's conversion so important to us?

\*What did Saul have to do to be saved?

\*What did Saul do after he was converted?

#### **Introduction**

In this text we are going to see an amazing change in one individual. Saul was a man who persecuted the church of Christ "to the death" (Acts 22:4). He dragged men and women believers out of their homes and put them in prison, helped to execute them, punished them in the synagogues, beat them, and tried to force them to blaspheme. Yet, by the end of his life, Saul had become the beloved apostle Paul, who taught the gospel throughout the world. He even wrote about half of the books of the New Testament.

The story of his conversion is so important to us that it is repeated three times: here in Acts 9, and twice in Paul's own words (Acts 22:3-21; 26:9-20). Why is it so important? Note the lesson that Paul himself said we could learn from it:

*"It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:15-16).*

The story of Saul is the story of Christ's love. If a murderous persecutor of God's people can change and be saved, so can any one of us!

#### **Acts 9:1-9      The vision on the road**

The disciples weren't the only ones who left Jerusalem when the major persecution began (remember Acts 8:1). Saul, a persecutor, left the city in order to chase after them! He wasn't satisfied that the believers were out of Jerusalem; he didn't want there to be anybody that followed Christ anywhere. So he got permission to go all the way to Damascus, a foreign city that was about a week's travel away, in order to put them in jail.

But things didn't go as Saul planned. On the road, a light brighter than the sun suddenly surrounded him and the people with him. They all fell to the ground, and a voice spoke to Saul and said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul did not know who was speaking. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Imagine how surprised and afraid Saul must have been! The very One he had been trying to destroy was speaking to him in a vision! Jesus told him to go to Damascus and wait for more instructions.

The men with Saul must have been very confused. They had seen the light, but not Jesus, and had heard the voice, but didn't understand what it said. And, after the vision, Saul was blind! So they had to lead him to Damascus by the hand. But even when Saul got there, he refused to eat and drink. He was probably sorrowful, afraid, and confused all at once, because he had "kicked against the goads" and gone against the will of God for so long.

**Note: Sinning in ignorance**

*Why did Saul act so violently against the disciples of Christ? Because he believed that was what God wanted him to do! He was a Jew, and like many other Jews, he thought the apostles were saying that the Law of Moses, the cultural law of the Jews, was worthless. Saul was “extremely zealous for [his] ancestral traditions” (Galatians 1:14), so he thought he had to try and stop these proclaimers of Jesus (see Acts 26:9). Saul was only doing what he sincerely thought was right.*

*But was he right? No; he was dead wrong! And so it is with many of us today. We believe our whole lives in one religious idea; our parents and pastors have taught it to us, and it has always seemed right. Does that mean it is what God wants? No! The only way to find out God’s will is by searching out the Scriptures diligently (see Acts 17:11). If we don’t follow the Scriptures, we might end up like Paul, fighting against God’s truth.*

### **Acts 9:10-22                      Saul is saved from his sins**

In Damascus, there was a disciple of Jesus named Ananias (not the one who died in chapter 5 for lying). Jesus told him in a vision to go to where Saul was staying. Saul had been praying, and knew from a vision that a man named Ananias was going to come to him and allow him to regain his sight. At first, Ananias hesitated. It was so hard to believe that someone who was so infamous for persecuting believers would suddenly change! Yet the Lord told him to go anyway; He had big plans for Saul. Saul was going to be an apostle who would spread the news about Jesus, not just to the Jews, but all over the world. So Ananias went after all, and even called Saul his brother when he got there. He put his hands on Saul, as people often did back then to show that something special was about to happen (see Acts 13:2-3). In this case, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes and his blindness went away. Then he got up and was baptized, just like Ananias told him to do to be forgiven of his sins (Acts 22:16). Finally, after three days, Saul ate and drank again.

#### ***Note: More important than food or water***

*People have gone several weeks before without eating. But the human body cannot survive more than about 3 days without water. Saul did not eat OR drink for 3 days! (verse 9). Why was he so distraught? Because he knew he was not in a right relationship with God. Up until then he had opposed Him! Saul only began to eat and drink when he knew his sins had been washed away in baptism (verses 18-19; see also Acts 22:16). Just like the Ethiopian eunuch (remember Acts 8:38-39), Saul rejoiced in his salvation after his baptism. Salvation is so much more important than food and water.*

### **Acts 9:23-31                      Reactions to Saul’s conversion**

Saul was so excited about his new faith that he went immediately and began to talk about Jesus in the Jewish churches, the synagogues. Imagine the surprise of the Jews, who knew Saul from before, when he was “a Hebrew of Hebrews”! (Philippians 3:5). Now Saul was proving over and over that Jesus was the Messiah that the Jews had rejected.

After a while, the Jews finally got so tired of Saul that they decided to get rid of him once and for all. But Saul found out about their plan to kill him. He needed to escape from the city, but his enemies were watching the gates of the city. So the other disciples had to lower him down in a basket from an opening in the walls of the city. What a turnaround! Saul had first come to Damascus hoping to persecute believers in Jesus, and he left the city being persecuted for his own belief in Jesus!

Eventually Saul made his way to Jerusalem and tried to join up with other disciples. But they remembered how Saul had been so violent against them, and were scared of him. They might not have ever believed that Saul had truly converted, except that Barnabas explained about Saul’s vision, and how he had defended Jesus’ cause in Damascus. So Saul was able to continue proclaiming Jesus in Jerusalem, just like in Damascus. And just like in Damascus, the Jews that he talked and debated with tried to

kill him. Again, the other brethren helped him to escape, sending him up to the northern city of Tarsus.

**Note: Forgiveness**

*At first it seems harsh that the brethren in Jerusalem would not accept Saul. But we should remember that just a short time before Saul had violently persecuted them. Would you listen to a preacher that had blinded or killed someone you loved? It would be hard. But disciples of Jesus need to show the same spirit of forgiveness that Jesus Himself shows. Ultimately, Jesus was the one that Saul had been persecuting (verse 5). Yet He was willing to forgive Saul and make him a servant in His kingdom. Barnabas is a good example of how we should act. Last time we saw him was in Acts 4:36-37, where he sold property to give it to poor brethren. He was such an encouraging person that the apostles gave him the name Barnabas, which means "Son of Encouragement." We need to be encouraging, and quick to forgive and defend someone who has turned his life around.*

**Choose the right answer:**

- \_\_\_ 1. Who did Saul say was the worst sinner? a) Pontius Pilate, b) Simon the magician, c) himself, or d) anyone who murders.
- \_\_\_ 2. What was Saul's religion before he became a believer in Christ? a) he didn't care about religion, b) he had always believed the gospel, c) paganism, or d) Judaism.
- \_\_\_ 3. Who appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus? a) Jesus, b) Peter, c) Philip, or d) Satan.
- \_\_\_ 4. For how long did Saul go without eating or drinking? a) one week, b) 40 days, c) 3 days, or d) 6 hours.
- \_\_\_ 5. Who came and laid his hands on Saul so that he would regain his sight? a) Peter and John, b) the Holy Spirit, c) Barnabas, or d) Ananias.
- \_\_\_ 6. Who explained about Saul's conversion to the brethren in Jerusalem? a) the Hellenistic Jews, b) Stephen, c) Barnabas, or d) Ananias.

**True or False:**

- \_\_\_ 1. Saul persecuted the disciples even though he knew it was wrong.
- \_\_\_ 2. Saul was going to Damascus in order to persecute Christians.
- \_\_\_ 3. Saul was saved from his sins when he prayed "the sinner's prayer" (verse 11).
- \_\_\_ 4. Saul proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues in Damascus immediately after his conversion.
- \_\_\_ 5. The Jews in Damascus and Jerusalem believed in Jesus when Saul taught about Him.
- \_\_\_ 6. The disciples in Jerusalem did not believe that Saul had truly converted.

*After you've filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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