

Acts 9

Learning

Engaging Acts 9:1-31 (some content you can use to prep and/or use as a group)

- **Recap:** We are now in the second literary section of Acts (6:8-9:31:) where **the Church is established beyond Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria**
- **Scripture** - Prayer for Guidance, then read Acts 9:1-31 (4 minutes)
- **Context:** The main character of this section is Saul, who we were introduced to briefly back in Acts 7:58 (and 8:3) at the stoning of Stephen. Saul was raised in a diaspora Jewish community, he is half Jewish and half hellenist (and a Roman Citizen by birthright). He was educated in the pharisaical tradition and apparently aligns with the methods of the Zealots, who believed “violence would be necessary to root our wickedness from Israel” (NT Wright). Paul’s dominant godly virtue was his zeal, but quite clearly God intended to redirect his zeal to a different method and purpose—to share the Gospel around the Mediterranean.
- **Interesting Words:** The word “Lord” (9:5) does not yet carry the messianic meaning it will in Paul’s later letters, it is simply him addressing someone of higher power and authority than him.
- **Culture:** The Samaritans also had a strong expectancy for a coming Messiah whom they called the *Taeb*, meaning “the one who restores.”
- **Themes:** Jesus’ identification with the Church in his statement “whom you are persecuting” (9:5) is a deep and profound mystery that is lost on most modern readers. We often have a very casual view of the church as a building, an organization, or even a brand. For Jesus he is one and the same reality with the community of believers. Also, worth mentioning, Paul’s experience is in one sense a dramatic conversion to a completely new development within Judaism, but at the same time it is also simply a fulfillment of his earlier misdirected zeal for Judaism.
- **Quote for expanding the discussion:**
As with the example of Paul, “A true conversion turns everything upside down. Saul arises blind and disabled. When he falls to the ground, also his own sense of importance and authority fall. Saul has to become a disciple of Ananias, who compared to him is a mere nobody.” Justo Gonzalez

Dialogue Questions (some example questions for this content above)

- What stands out to you from this dramatic conversion story of Saul? What does it reveal about God and his church?
- From this story, what do we learn about God’s power and the type of power He wants his followers to exert?
- What subtle, but large role do you think Barnabas played in Saul’s life in this crucial season?

Implication Questions (some example questions/challenges that engage real life now)

- **Reflect:** Read the quote. Reflect on your conversion stories. In what ways were they both dramatic discontinuities and slow continuities with your past? How has time given you more clarity on your own conversion story?
- **Reflect:** The place of suffering in Paul’s life is previewed in this text and evident through the rest of the NT? What place does suffering hold in your understanding of Christian discipleship?
- **Respond:** In the second part of this story we see the clear ways Paul’s life dramatically changed after his calling. Are there any things, small or large, that you know the Lord has called you to pursue, but you have not been giving intentional action to? Could be passions, skills, people, or vocational... take some time to prayerfully reflect and plan a way to respond this week.
- **During the Gathered Season:** Read and explore Acts on your own as the Lord leads you.

Scriptures

The Conversion of Saul

[Act 9:1](#) Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest

[Act 9:2](#) and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

[Act 9:3](#) As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

[Act 9:4](#) He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

[Act 9:5](#) "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

[Act 9:6](#) "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

[Act 9:7](#) The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.

[Act 9:8](#) Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

[Act 9:9](#) For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

[Act 9:10](#) In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

[Act 9:11](#) The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

[Act 9:12](#) In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

[Act 9:13](#) "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.

[Act 9:14](#) And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

[Act 9:15](#) But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

[Act 9:16](#) I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

[Act 9:17](#) Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

[Act 9:18](#) Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,

Saul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues

[Act 9:19](#) and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

[Act 9:20](#) At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

[Act 9:21](#) All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

[Act 9:22](#) Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

Saul Escapes from Damascus

[Act 9:23](#) After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him,

[Act 9:24](#) but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.

[Act 9:25](#) But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

Saul in Jerusalem

[Act 9:26](#) When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

[Act 9:27](#) But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

[Act 9:28](#) So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

[Act 9:29](#) He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him.

[Act 9:30](#) When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

[Act 9:31](#) Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.