

SAUL'S CONVERSION

Acts 9:1-31

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Saul

Key-locations: Road to Damascus, Damascus, Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- Persecution: Saul received permission to arrest Jesus' followers in Damascus (Ac 9:1-2); Jesus identified with his followers who were being persecuted (Ac 9:5); Saul preached in Damascus and Jews decided to kill him (Ac 9:20-25); Saul preached in Jerusalem and Jews tried to kill him (Ac 9:28-30).
- Jesus spoke to: Saul (Ac 9:4-6); Ananias (Ac 9:10-17).
- Jesus' followers resisted accepting Saul as a believer: Ananias (Ac 9:13-14); the disciples in Jerusalem (Ac 9:26).
- Saul fled from: Damascus (Ac 9:23-25); Jerusalem (Ac 9:29-30).
- The Lord commanded "Go" to: Saul (Ac 9:6); Ananias (Ac 9:11, 15).

Key-attitudes:

- Saul's rage against Jesus' followers.
- Saul and his fellow travelers' astonishment at the bright light and Jesus' voice.
- Ananias and the disciples' fear of Saul.
- Jews' hatred of Saul when he began preaching Jesus.

Initial-situation:

Stephen was one of the seven men chosen to help the apostles distribute food to the widows. Men falsely accused Stephen, arrested him, and stoned him to death. Saul approved Stephen's stoning. Saul went from house to house, arresting people who professed belief in Jesus. The Lord's followers scattered, telling people about Jesus wherever they went.

Initial-problem:

Saul kept threatening to kill the followers of the Lord. Saul obtained letters from the high priest to the synagogues in Damascus, giving him permission to take prisoners of those who belonged to the Way.

Final-situation:

After Saul left Jerusalem, the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and it grew in numbers.

BIBLE STORY

Saul kept threatening to kill the Lord's disciples. Saul received letters from the high priest addressed to synagogue leaders in the city of Damascus. The letters gave Saul permission to arrest any in Damascus who belonged to the Way of Christ.

Saul neared Damascus; a light from heaven flashed around him. Saul fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?"

The voice answered, "I'm Jesus, the one you're persecuting. Get up! Go into the city. You'll be told what you must do."

Paul's traveling companions were speechless. They heard the voice, but didn't see anyone. Saul was blind when he got up from the ground. Saul's companions led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days Saul was blind, and he didn't eat or drink (Ac 9:1-9).

A disciple named Ananias lived in the city of Damascus. In a vision, the Lord said, "Ananias! Go to Judas' house on Straight Street and ask for Saul of Tarsus. Saul is praying. Saul saw a vision of a man named Ananias placing his hands on him to restore his sight."

Ananias answered, "Lord, this man did terrible things to your people in Jerusalem. Saul came here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

The Lord told Ananias, "Go! I chose this man as my instrument to carry my name before the nations and their kings, and to the people of Israel. I'll show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Ac 9:10-16).

Ananias entered Judas' house, placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who you saw on the road to Damascus, sent me. The Lord Jesus wants you to see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Something resembling fish scales fell from Saul's eyes, and Saul could see again. Saul stood up and was baptized. Saul ate and regained his strength (Ac 9:17-19).

Saul began to preach in the synagogues in Damascus saying, "Jesus is the Son of God." Saul's listeners were amazed and asked, "Isn't this the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem against those who worship Jesus? Saul came here to take worshipers of Jesus as prisoners to the chief priests!" The Jews in Damascus could not argue with Saul's proof that Jesus is the Christ. The Jews in Damascus conspired to kill Saul. However, Saul's followers took him by night and lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the wall (Ac 9:20-25).

Saul went to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples. (*According to Galatians 1:15-18, Saul's trip to Jerusalem probably happened three years after his conversion.*) However, the disciples feared Saul; they didn't believe that Saul really was a disciple. Barnabas took Saul to the apostles. Barnabas told the apostles how Saul saw the Lord, the Lord spoke to Saul, and Saul preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus. Then Saul moved about Jerusalem with the disciples. Saul spoke boldly in the name of the Lord. Some

Greek-speaking Jews tried to kill Saul. Believers took Saul down to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus (Ac 9:26-30).

Then the church experienced peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. The church was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. The church grew in numbers as people lived in the fear of the Lord (Ac 9:31).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Saul, the persecutor of the church, become a believer in Jesus?
2. How did God first get your attention?
3. How has God asked you to do something similar to Ananias, that goes against “common sense”?
4. This is the only record of Ananias in the Bible, but Saul became famous. What is the significance that “insignificant” people do “significant” work for God?
5. After Saul’s conversion, what happened to him in Damascus?
6. Why were the disciples in Jerusalem afraid of Saul?
7. What risk did Barnabas take?
8. Who played the role of Ananias or Barnabas in your life?
9. With whom does God want you to play the role of Ananias or Barnabas?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Jesus so identifies with his followers that to mistreat one of them is to hurt him.** Saul was persecuting Jesus' followers. Jesus told Saul, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Ac 9:5). Jesus considers that everything that is done for one of his followers is done for him. He identifies so intimately with his believers that they are considered as one with him (Mat 10:40-42; 25:31-45; Ac 9:1, 4-5). In the Old Testament, God so identified with his people that he considered their distress to be his distress (Is 63:9). Whoever touches God’s people, touches the apple of his eye and will be punished by him (Zec 2:7-8; Mat 10:40; 25:31-45; Ac 9:1, 4-5).
2. **The religious person may be sincere and yet still be wrong.** As a good Pharisee, Saul knew the Old Testament Scriptures. Saul carefully followed legalistic rules and daily followed prayer rituals. Saul thought that he was doing the will of God when he persecuted Christians. However, when he persecuted Christians, he was really persecuting Jesus Christ (Ac 9:4-5).

3. **Jesus is Lord; he has the right to demand that his reluctant follower obey him.** Jesus ordered Ananias to go to Saul, the man who persecuted Jesus' followers. Ananias obeyed Jesus, even though he feared Saul (Ac 9:13-14).
4. **The new convert to Jesus should immediately begin to tell others about the Lord.** Immediately after his conversion, Paul preached in the synagogues about Jesus. Paul affirmed that Jesus was the Son of God (Ac 9:20).
5. **The person who testifies for Jesus may experience hostility from those who reject the gospel.** Saul preached in Damascus after his conversion. The Jews decided to kill him, so he fled (Ac 9:19-25). He went to Jerusalem and spoke boldly about the Lord to the Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to kill him (Ac 9:26-29).
6. **The person who has done evil and later converts to follow Jesus Christ, is accepted by God and fellow Christians should accept him also.** Saul went to Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples, but all feared him because they did not believe he was a true follower of Jesus (Ac 9:26). Ananias accepted Saul as a brother in Christ (Ac 9:17), and so did Barnabas (Ac 9:27).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

Ask for volunteers to tell the story from the viewpoint of characters in the story:

- One of Saul's traveling companions describes what happened on the road to Damascus.
- Ananias tells God why he doesn't want to go see Saul.
- Two believers in Jerusalem react to the news that Barnabas took Saul to see the apostles.