

Saul Becomes a Believer

(Acts 9:1-22)

Introduction

Alternate Introduction

Have an adult dressed like Saul and carrying scrolls come storming into the class room saying, "My name is Saul, and I have letters giving me permission to arrest those who believe in Jesus. I can't imagine how anybody could believe that He is really the Son of God and that He actually came back to life from the dead. These believers are causing nothing but trouble. They must be stopped!" Saul continues grumbling as he leaves the class room.

Regular Introduction

We have been learning that during the time just after Jesus returned to heaven, His followers suffered dreadful persecution. People were thrown into prison for telling others about Jesus; some were killed for their faith.

One of the chief persecutors was a man named Saul. Saul had stood by and watched men stone Stephen to death. Stephen was the first Christian to be killed for his faith in Jesus. (He was the first *martyr*.)

Wherever Saul went he uttered murderous threats against the followers of Jesus. How he hated them! From house to house he went, dragging out the believers and having them thrown into jail without good cause.

How frightening it must have been for the believers in the early church to have to face someone like Saul!

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You that we live in a free country where we can freely worship You and study Your word. So, many Christians in the world today have to meet in secret, fearing for their lives! But we can walk

down the street with our Bibles; we can talk about You openly; we can have Christian concerts in public parks. Help us never to take this privilege for granted, Lord. Help us to be bold witnesses for You and take advantage of our freedom to tell people about You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Lesson

Hundreds of Christians had fled from the city of Jerusalem, and Saul was determined to track them down and bring them back. When Saul heard that some of the believers had traveled 150 miles away (a 6-day journey) to Damascus, he set off with troops to drag them back in chains. He was determined to wipe out Jesus' followers. But God had other plans for Saul!

Open your Bibles to Acts 9 where we pick up the story.

Acts 9:1-2

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. (2) He 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.

Saul went to the high priest for letters that would grant him permission to go to Damascus to arrest believers and take them back to Jerusalem to be put in prison.

Saul was a Pharisee. He knew the teachings of the Old Testament well. He thought he was pleasing God by trying to eliminate Christians! He did not believe that Jesus is God or that He had risen from the dead. He punished Jesus' followers because he thought they were teaching things against what he understood the Bible to teach. He was passionate about righteousness, but he didn't know the truth about God.

As Saul traveled along the road to Damascus, something incredible happened.

Acts 9:3-4

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. (4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

Saul and his men had nearly reached Damascus when suddenly, at about midday, there was a blinding flash of light in the sky and the Lord spoke to him and he fell to the ground.

Acts 9:5

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!"

God wanted Saul to know that Jesus had truly risen from the dead and so He met him on the road in this spectacular way! In this dramatic moment, Saul believed that Jesus was the Christ, the One God had promised in the scriptures to send to save everyone from their sins.

Even though Saul had persecuted Christians and even thrown them into prison to be put to death, because of God's great love for Saul, God showed him that Jesus really is alive!

God wants to do that for every human being that ever lived. God is full of mercy and grace. He doesn't want anyone to die and go to hell. He wants all people to come to believe the Good News! And, He does everything He can to get everybody's attention! No one is without excuse for not coming to believe in Jesus! (Romans 1:18-21)

Acts 9:6-7

Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (7) The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one!

Saul was blinded by the light.

Acts 9:8-9

*Saul 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. (9) He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.*

Saul's soldiers probably saw him stagger to his feet. They had to lead him like a blind man to Damascus. After three days, God sent help.

Acts 9:10-12

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."

Ask: What do you think was going through Ananias' mind at this point?

He was probably awe struck by having a vision of the Lord speaking to him; it's not every day we have an actual conversation with the Creator of the universe! Also, he was probably afraid to face Saul because he had a bad reputation for persecuting the believers. Ananias was probably terrified.

Ask: If you had been Ananias and God told you to go to visit Saul, how would you feel?

Acts 9:13-16

"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers 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."

It must have been scary, but Ananias was obedient to the Lord and went to Saul.

We must obey and follow God's leading, even when he leads us to difficult people and places.

Acts 9:17-19

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.

That day, Saul's body received a healing and his mind received a healing as well. As the scales (like crusty coverings) fell from his eyes, Saul was able to see both physically and spiritually. As a sign of his conversion, Saul was baptized and began his new life as God's chosen apostle.

God had sent Ananias to encourage Saul and give him exciting news. Ananias told this new believer about the special plans that God had for his life (see verse 15).

God has special plans for your life, too. God promises to lead us and guide us every day. He will direct our steps if we just ask Him to show us the way and trust that His way is the best for us.

Saul, now a believer, is full of the Holy Spirit and began to boldly preach the Good News about Jesus, how He came and died for our sins, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven.

Acts 9:20-22

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.

Saul had been a persecutor of Christians and that angered the Christians. Now he boldly taught people that Jesus is the Promised Savior. But this now angered the Jews. They got together and decided to kill Saul!

Acts 9:23-24

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.

Saul's new Christian friends learned about this plot and came up with a plan to save Saul.

Acts 9:25

So during the night, some of the other believers lowered him in a large basket through an opening in the city wall.

Saul then returned to Jerusalem and wanted to visit with the other believers living there.

Acts 9:26

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the believers, but they were all afraid of him. They did not believe he had truly become a believer!

Poor Saul! The believers there were scared to death! All they knew about Saul was he was a man who tried to destroy the church and threw believers in jail. They thought that Saul was trying to trick them into believing he had changed.

Acts 9:27-29

Then Barnabas brought him to the apostles and told them how Saul had seen the Lord on the way to Damascus and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. He also told them that Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus in Damascus. (28) So Saul stayed with the apostles and went all

around Jerusalem with them, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. He debated with some Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to murder him.

Barnabas encouraged the believers in Jerusalem to trust that Saul was a true believer. And Saul continued to preach boldly in Jerusalem.

But once again his life was in danger from the Jews who wanted to kill him.

Acts 9:30

When the believers heard about this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his hometown.

His friends took him away from Jerusalem, put him on a ship and sent him back to his home town of Tarsus to stay for a while. [Use map.]

Let's see what happened to the church once Saul is out of the way...

Acts 9:31

The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.

After Saul left for Tarsus, the believers in Israel enjoyed a time of peace. The Holy Spirit encouraged and strengthened the believers and the church continued to grow; more and more people believed in Jesus.

As we continue our study through the Book of Acts, we will learn more and more about Saul. We will see how God used this once persecutor of believers to boldly share the Good News even though he faced many difficulties.

What a strange twist of fate for Saul, who set out to destroy Christianity, to suddenly become the most well-known of all God's apostles. Did you know that most of the New Testament was written by this same man, whose name was changed from Saul to Paul?

In His sovereignty, God can take even the most hateful of all people and turn them around for His own good purposes! [Teacher, review today's memory verse.]

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, You are so good and so full of mercy and grace. You took this man, Saul, who was persecuting people who believed in You, and you changed him from the inside out. You loved him, even when he was a murderer and a hater, and you used him in a mighty way to teach people about your grace. Help us to be as loving and forgiving of others as You are with us! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

GAME CENTER

Pass the Chicken (or another stuffed animal)

Sit with your students in a circle. One receives a question while a rubber chicken is passed around the circle. The student must answer the question correctly before the chicken comes back around to them.

Fact or Fiction

When an answer is fiction ask student for correct answer:

1. Saul was a Sadducee who knew the teachings of the Bible. (Fiction, he was a Pharisee.)
2. Saul was traveling to Damascus to visit his sick grandmother. (Fiction, he was traveling to Damascus to imprison believers.)
3. Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting Him? (Fact)
4. The men travelling with Jesus heard the voice speaking from Heaven. (Fact)

5. Saul fasted (did not eat or drink) for four days. (Fact)
 6. Saul was blinded and sat at the home of Judas for three days. (Fact)
 7. God told Sapphira to go to Damascus and restore Saul's sight. (Fiction, the man's name was Ananias.)
 8. Ananias was excited to go to Saul because he had heard so much about him. (Fiction, he was scared of Saul.)
 9. The Lord told Ananias that Saul was to share the Good News to the Gentiles. (Fact)
 10. Saul was baptized and then immediately something like scales fell from his eyes. (Fiction, he regained his sight then was baptized.)
 11. Saul preached the Good News boldly and everyone loved him. (Fiction, some wanted to kill him.)
 12. Saul was let down through a hole in the wall in a basket. (Fact)
 13. The Jews in Jerusalem were glad to meet Saul because they had heard he had radically changed. (Fiction, they were all afraid of him; they did not believe he was a true disciple.)
 14. Barnabas defended Saul and told the disciples in Jerusalem that Saul had preached Jesus in Damascus. (Fact)
 15. The Greek-speaking Jews tried to murder Saul. (Fact)
 16. Once the disciples sent Saul away, the church had peace and began to grow. (Fact)
 17. God can transform a person's life when they believe in Jesus. (Fact)
 18. God only has work for some followers to do. (Fiction, believers are His workmanship created for good works.)
- Or, use the following questions in another game or discussion:
1. Why did Paul travel to Damascus? (To find Christians to take back to Jerusalem to put in prison.)
 2. What did Jesus ask Saul when He suddenly appear to him on the road to Damascus? (*Saul, why are you persecuting me?*)
 3. What did the men travelling with Saul see and hear when the Lord appeared to Saul? (They heard the voice but didn't see anyone.)
 4. What happened to Saul after speaking with the Lord? (He became blind and for 3 days he fasted.)
 5. The Lord appeared to a man named Ananias in a vision. What did the Lord tell Ananias to do? (Go to Saul, pray for him that he may regain his sight.)
 6. Why was it scary for Ananias to obey the Lord? (He'd heard about Saul and knew he was the one that was capturing Christians and throwing them into prison.)
 7. What was the first thing Saul did after he regained his sight? (He was baptized.)
 8. What did Saul's friends do when he found out that the Jews were plotting to kill him? (They helped him escape by lowering Saul through a hole in the wall in a basket.)
 9. When Saul returned to Jerusalem he met up with the apostles, but they didn't believe that Saul was now a believer. Who spoke up for him? (Barnabas defended Saul.)
 10. Because Saul was boldly preaching the Good News, the Jews in Jerusalem wanted to kill him. How did he escape this time? (His friends took him to Caesarea and put him on a ship to Tarsus.)
 11. Once the disciples sent Saul away, what happened to the church? (It had peace and began to grow.)
 12. What did the church experience after Saul was sent to Tarsus? (Peace and growth.)

