



• **Lesson 11 (Acts 9:1-22)** •
**“Saul, Why Are You
Persecuting Me?”**

The events of Acts 9 represent a major turning point in Luke’s orderly account of early church history. Saul was introduced to the narrative in Acts 8:1 as approving of Stephen’s execution. In Acts 8:3 he was “ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.” Having followed the efforts of Philip throughout the rest of Acts 8, Luke returns to Saul and documents his dramatic conversion to Christ in Acts 9. Saul of Tarsus, the terrible persecutor of the Lord’s church will grow to become the influential apostle Paul—one of the most important figures in the spread of the gospel far beyond the city of Jerusalem and the region of Judea (Acts 1:8).

Who Was Saul?

- A Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5)
- A Pharisee, the son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6)
- Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, a center of Grecian culture (Acts 22:3)
- Enjoyed the privilege of Roman citizenship from birth (Acts 22:28)
- A tent-maker by trade (Acts 18:3)
- Reflects training in Greek; his letters—written in a polished Greek style—contain examples and illustrations that reflect a strong Greek background, enabling him to quote a Grecian poet (Acts 17:28) and a Cretan “prophet” (Titus 1:12)
- Brought up in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3; 26:4) and provided a rich education at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the most respected rabbis in Jewish history (Acts 5:34)
- Advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries (Gal 1:14)
- Possessed a burning zeal for God and the law of Moses (Acts 22:3)
- Was convinced that he must do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 26:9)
- Persecuted Christians even to foreign cities (Acts 26:11) with the authority of the high priest himself (Acts 9:1-2)
- Bound and delivered both male and female disciples of Jesus to prison (Acts 22:4)
- When execution was weighed as punishment for Christians, he cast his vote against them (Acts 26:10)

Acts contains three separate accounts of Saul's conversion:



- Acts 9 is Luke's historical record of the event
- Acts 22:1-21 is Paul's account as he relates it to an angry Jewish mob in Jerusalem
- Acts 26:1-23 is Paul's account as he addresses King Agrippa

The emphasis Luke places on this conversion is an indication of its importance to the larger story.

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to **the Way**, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2)

⇒ Note Luke's description of Christianity in Acts 9:2 as "the Way." We will continue to run across this phrase throughout Acts (19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). What does Luke intend by its use?

⇒ What are the implications of the phrase, especially considering the context?

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." (Acts 9:3-5)

⇒ Place yourself in Saul's "sandals" at this moment. He must have immediately had some shattering realizations. What might some of them have been?

Damascus was a city located about 135 miles northeast of Jerusalem, about 60 miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee, on the edge of the Syrian Desert. The ancient city lies buried beneath the modern city of Damascus, the capital of Syria. A sizeable number of Jews lived in the city. Josephus reports in *The Jewish War* that somewhere between ten and eighteen thousand Jews were killed in Damascus at the outbreak of the Jewish revolt against Rome in A.D. 66.



Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." (Acts 9:10-12)

⇒ Place yourself in Ananias' "sandals" at this moment. What might you have been thinking?

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9:15-16)

⇒ What does the Lord mean by referring to Saul as "a chosen instrument"?

⇒ In what way could Saul be an especially effective "instrument" in carrying the name of Jesus to others?

⇒ Why would suffering be a reality from the very beginning of Saul's conversion?

Even though Saul was physically blind for three days, there were certain things he came to “see” very clearly. In your own words, how did Saul grow to realize:

- ⇒ Simply being a “religious” person was not enough?
(Gal 1:13-14)

- ⇒ Being sincere doesn’t necessarily make one right?
(Acts 26:9-11)

- ⇒ Conscience doesn’t always lead in the right direction?
(Acts 23:1; 24:16)

- ⇒ He had been ignorant of God’s will?
(1 Tim 1:12-14)

- ⇒ The “chief of sinners” could be saved?
(1 Tim 1:15)

- ⇒ He had to change the way he was serving God?
(Phil 3:2-11)

- ⇒ The Lord could use him in powerful ways?
(Acts 26:15-18)

- ⇒ What sinners must do in order to be saved?
(Acts 22:14-16)

For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 9:19-22)

- ⇒ What does it say that Saul “immediately” proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God”?

- ⇒ **THOUGHT QUESTION:** How would Saul have gone about “proving” that “Jesus was the Christ” to the Jews who lived in Damascus?

A-C-T-S made personal

Based on my study of Acts 9:1-22:

A - doration: God is worthy of my **praise** because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture reminded me to **evaluate...**

T - rust: my **faith** in my Savior has grown because...

S - trength: I was particularly **helped** and **encouraged** by...

