

Acts 9:1-19

Jun 28/6

Acts 9:

Saul's Conversion

Read the whole of Acts 9 to get an overall understanding of the text. We will go through the first half of the chapter verse by verse to deepen your understanding of the text. Discuss the questions with your friends and family! The bible is the fusions of history and faith - we can explore these two each time we read it.

Who was Saul?

Phil 3:5 tells us that Saul was of Hebrew descent, circumcised on the "8th day", he was a Benjaminite - Saul was a devout Jew. He passionately defended his faith through the persecution of Christians. Saul was a persecutor of early Christians (Gal 1:13). **His attempt at annihilating early Christians was supported by religious leaders and the state!**

As a devout Jew, Saul would've been well versed in the scriptures. Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53: 1-2 tell vivid prophecies about Jesus that were fulfilled. Saul, like many other Jews rejected Jesus, see Matt 27:22. They did not believe that Christ is the messiah.

Saul's Conversion

9:1-19pp — Ac 22:3-16; 26:9-18

9 ¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.^a He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus,^b so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way,^c whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

The earliest Believers were known as followers of. "The Way"

Q1. Can you think of any verses that might suggest why this was the first name chosen by Christians?

If you are a Christian now, do you think this is an appropriate name for followers of Christ? Why?

In this time Paul made all Christ-followers his victims.

Q2. Consider the language here and in Acts 8:3.

Is it significant that Paul took people as prisoners regardless of their gender? What might this connote about the nature of Saul's pursuits?

Thinking beyond...

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/north-korea/>

Open doors is a charity that supports persecuted Christians today. Read this page about persecution in North Korea. Commit to praying for these Christians who have chosen to boldly proclaim their faith like Stephen in Acts 8.

Q3: We benefit from laws and societal freedoms that criminalise persecution due to faith. Can we be victims of religious persecution?

Saul had already experienced great success as he neared Damascus. Ch 8 tells us that Saul approved of stoning, he began to destroy the church and Christ's followers were scattered.

Saul saw Jesus and heard the audible voice of Christ. In Corinthians we are told that Paul was made an apostle as a result of this encounter.

Saul was physically affected by the presence of Jesus!

Q4: Think, why might Christ have chosen to appear to Paul in this way?

At this point, Jesus had died, resurrected and ascended. This was a miraculous interaction.

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.^d 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice^e say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."^f

Q5: Repetition of names to address another is often associated with tenderness and affection (another example can be seen in Luke 10:14). How might this be an out working of the Gospel?

Q6: Read Mark 16:19. How might these two verses relate?

Q7: How might Paul have felt hearing Christ's voice? Remember, in Ch 8 he supported the brutal killing of Stephen! What might've been going through his mind?

Q8: Why might their presence have been useful? How do witnesses affect the reliability of a story?

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound^g but did not see anyone.^h 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing.ⁱ So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision,^j "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus^k named Saul, for he is praying." 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on^l him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people^m in Jerusalem."ⁿ 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests^o to arrest all who call on your name."^p

Saul prayed, this is a result of the transformation that had occurred upon encountering Jesus. Praying to God freely, without a priest, with emotion is a result of Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus connects us straight to God.

TASK: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-mediator.html> You can read this article to learn **why** we need a mediator to connect us to God.

Q9: Should Ananias have responded in this way? Why might he have responded like this?

Q10: A prophet in the Old Testament acted similarly to Ananias when God asked them to share his message. Can you remember who?

Jesus revealed his master plan! The Gentiles were considered an unholy people. Saul, as a devout Jew, would not have interacted with Gentiles. The OT tells us that the Israelites were separated from other nations as the people of God. This tells us that it was part of God's plan to make those other nations, part of his people too! (Eph 3:6)

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument^q to proclaim my name to the Gentiles^r and their kings^s and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."^t

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on^u 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."^v

18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,^w 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Q12: Consider this chapter and what we know about Saul so far. **What is so significant about his conversion?**

Most Christians have never seen Jesus. **Why might God have chosen to reveal himself to Saul as he did?**

Q11: Ananias went from attempting to warn Jesus about Saul to recognising Saul as his brother. **WHY?**

What does this tell us about how we should interact with other Christians?

Thinking about forgiveness:

Read Matt 6: 9-13. Jesus gave us the blueprint for prayer. He tells us that the ability to forgive is in fact integral to our forgiveness in God. **How did Christ demonstrate forgiveness with Saul? Was Saul met with anger and judgement? How can this inform our interactions with others?**

#Cancel culture defines much of our social interactions today. One misstep can lead to livelihoods lost and total condemnation by many. Is this a Christian way to behave?

Final remarks:

This chapter tells us about the immense power of the Gospel.

There is no sin that Jesus cannot cleanse.

We are made pure by simply having faith in Him; Jesus met Saul (Paul) as he journeyed to organise more brutal killings of Christians for merely believing the gospel - through their interaction Saul was made pure and forgiven! Saul became Paul, Paul wrote 13 books in the bible! Paul dedicated his existence to knowing more of God and seeing others come to God through Christ. He wrote the Trinity verse for 2020 which is:

1 Cor 2:2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The gospel is the greatest gift we could ever receive.