



LESSON 32

Saul is converted

ACTS 9:1-31



Jesus spreads His name through the people He chooses.



“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).

Supporting Truths

1. Jesus is at work to spread His name.
2. Jesus chooses unlikely witnesses.
3. Jesus turns His enemies into friends.
4. People who proclaim Jesus are persecuted for Jesus.
5. Jesus uses humble Christians.

Objectives

1. State who spoke to Saul and Ananias.
2. Describe what Ananias and the disciples thought about Saul.
3. Explain how Jesus called, convicted, and converted Saul.
4. Describe how the Jews reacted to Saul’s preaching.
5. Consider how Ananias and Barnabas were later overshadowed by Saul.



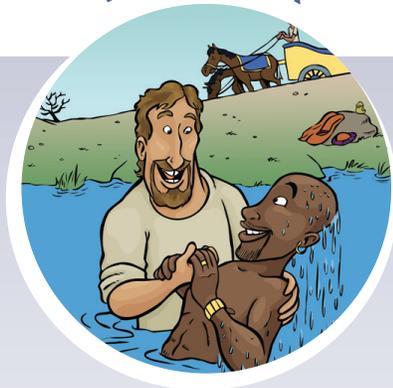
Lesson Summary

Persecution against the church was getting worse. But when Saul set out for Damascus to arrest and kill Christians there, Jesus stopped him by appearing to him on the way. When Saul saw Jesus, he realized his sin and sought Jesus. Jesus then sent Ananias to welcome Saul as a believer and to equip Saul to be a special instrument to spread His name. By appearing to Saul, Jesus brought peace to the church, providing its members time to grow and mature.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Every person is born an enemy of God. Yet God's grace still extends to us just as it did to Saul. For this reason, we should examine our lives to see if they please God. If our lives prove that we are an enemy of the Lord, we should respond as Saul did and submit to Jesus and repent of our sin. When we do, God promises to make us—who were once His enemies—His children.

LAST WEEK



**Philip shares the gospel
with the Ethiopian**
Acts 8:26-40

THIS WEEK



Saul is converted
Acts 9:1–31

NEXT WEEK



**The Gentiles receive
the gospel**
Acts 10:1–11:18

Lesson Commentary

Jesus spreads His name through the people He chooses.

After Stephen's death, the young church was battered by *persecution* (Acts 8:1). It is true that the Holy Spirit used this to achieve greater success in spreading the gospel (8:4). But as the church kept *suffering for Christ*, could it survive? Could believers complete the mission Jesus had given them (1:8)? Or was the mission doomed? As we will see, the mission will succeed because Jesus is the one leading the mission.

Jesus defeated the persecutor of His gospel (9:1–9)

The greatest persecutor of the early church was Saul. He was a Roman citizen (22:28) and a Pharisee trained by one of the most famous rabbis (22:3; 23:6). His qualifications were flawless (Phil 3:4), and his zeal to rip the church apart was furious (3:6; Acts 8:3). He had agreed with putting Stephen to death (8:1), and he was convinced that he was doing the right thing (26:9). He was obsessed with persecution (9:1–2). It was his way of life. It consumed him. He did not want Christians in prison. He wanted them dead (26:10–11). And not just in Jerusalem, but everywhere (9:2; 26:11). His life was all about destroying the *Way*, all those who claimed that Jesus was the way to God (John 14:6; Acts 9:2; 18:26). Therefore he set off for Damascus, a large city in Syria, north of Judea, where Christianity had begun to spread among the large Jewish community.

Saul had authority from the high priest, but he was about to meet someone with even more authority. Even though it was noon (Acts 22:6), Saul saw a supernatural light brighter than the sun (9:3), and he also heard a clear voice (9:4). Those with him saw the light and heard a sound too (9:7; 22:9), but only Saul actually saw Jesus and understood His words (1 Cor 15:8). Saul immediately knew that this person was the Lord (Acts 9:5). But who exactly was this Lord? The answer shook Saul's world. What he thought was great service to the Lord was actually great sin against Jesus. By persecuting believers, Saul was persecuting

Jesus, because believers are so closely united to Him that they are like His own body (Col 1:24). Saul was horrified at what he had done, and from then on he considered himself the greatest of sinners (1 Tim 1:15).

Saul's experience was unique, but it shows two principles of salvation. First, Jesus calls the sinner. He causes the sinner to see who Jesus really is (John 6:37, 44; 2 Cor 4:6), and as a result, He causes the sinner to desire to live under His authority (Acts 9:6, 8; 22:10–11). In other words, this call turns a person into someone who sincerely seeks God (Isa 55:6). This is what happened to Saul, who spent the next three days seeking Jesus in prayer (Acts 9:9, 11). Second, Jesus convicts the sinner by showing him how desperately sinful he is (Luke 18:13). He replaces pride with humility so that the sinner is ready to respond in faith (Matt 11:25; 18:3). As a result, Saul, instead of entering Damascus as a proud conqueror of Christians, was led in as a humble captive of Christ (Acts 9:8). By calling and convicting Saul, Jesus defeated the church's fiercest persecutor.

Jesus made him a witness to His gospel (9:10–19)

But Jesus had much more planned than just ending Saul's hostility. In answer to Saul's prayers, Jesus told Ananias to go to him (9:10–12). Ananias was a leader among the Damascus Christians, and even unbelieving Jews respected him as a devout man (22:12). When he heard Jesus' voice, he said, "Here I am," showing that he was ready to obey. But when he heard Jesus' instructions, he was confused. Was Saul not the enemy (9:13–14)? Jesus answered that He had chosen Saul to be His instrument (9:15). This shows that Jesus is the one in charge. He is the one leading the mission to proclaim His name to the whole world. And now He had chosen to use Saul to accomplish a big part of that mission—to Jews (Rom 1:16), to Gentiles (11:13), and to kings (Acts 26). And if that was not enough to convince Ananias, Jesus added that instead of causing more suffering, Saul would himself suffer greatly for Jesus (9:16; 2 Cor 11:24–29).

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

Saul is converted • Acts 9:1–31



THINK ABOUT IT

The church's greatest enemy would become its greatest emissary.

Through Ananias, Saul's *conversion* was complete. The process of *turning from self and turning toward Jesus* had already begun, but now we see from Saul's faith that it is complete.

Saul's new sight and baptism show his faith. Through Ananias, Saul's blindness was healed, and his renewed physical sight reflects his new spiritual sight, the sight of faith that perceives things that are not visible (Acts 9:17–18; Heb 11:1, 13, 27; 2 Cor 4:4–6). Saul's faith is also seen in his baptism. Outwardly, *baptism is immersion in water*. But it is also *a symbol of inward unity with Jesus*. It is identifying with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection and committing to live as one who belongs to Him (Rom 6:1–4). It is also *a sign of trusting God to wash away sin* as water washes away dirt (1 Pet 3:21). As Paul responded to the gospel by faith, his conversion was complete.

Along with the human response in conversion comes the divine act of *regeneration*. This is *new birth by the Spirit* (John 3:3), when *the Spirit radically changes a person from the inside out* (2 Cor 5:17). We see that this happened to Saul because the Spirit also filled him (Acts 9:17). Not only did Saul need the Spirit to be saved, but he also needed the Spirit in order to be a key witness to Jesus (1:8). Saul knew this: he was just a clay jar, and it was only God's power within that made the difference (2 Cor 4:7). Like all Christians, Saul needed to be transformed in order to display Christ (2 Cor 3:18). And Saul really did change! He changed from a proud and bitter persecutor to a humble and joyful sufferer (Phil 3:4–11), and from an arrogant legalist to a grateful believer (1 Tim 1:13–17). Before, he had appointed himself to be chief persecutor. Now, he knew he was an apostle not because of anything in him, but simply by God's gracious choice (Gal 1:1). Saul's salvation was complete: Jesus had made him a totally new man.

Jesus proclaimed and protected His gospel (9:20–31)

Jesus' plan for Saul began right away. Immediately Saul proclaimed the opposite of what he used to believe. He said Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:20), which means He is the Messiah who has all the authority of the Father (Mark 14:61). The Jews were astounded by how completely he had changed (Acts 9:21). After that, Saul spent about three years in the area just south of Damascus called Nabatean Arabia (Gal 1:17–18). The Nabatean king, Aretas, must not have liked Saul's preaching there, so even after Saul returned to Damascus, Aretas worked with the Jews to try to capture him (Acts 9:23; 2 Cor 11:32). Saul escaped, but just as Jesus had said, he was already preaching and being persecuted for Jesus (Acts 9:24–25).

This pattern would continue in Jerusalem, but first, Saul had to overcome opposition from within the church. The Christians there were suspicious: was Saul tricking everyone in order to hurt them more? Fortunately, Barnabas the encourager made peace, and Saul met Peter and James (Acts 9:26–27; Gal 1:18–19). After that Saul continued proclaiming that Jesus is Lord, until he again needed to flee (Acts 9:28–30). This time, he went back to his hometown, Tarsus, until Barnabas came to give him a new mission (11:25).

While God had used persecution to spread the gospel, He now gave the church peace. He knows the church needs times of peace in order to grow in spiritual maturity (9:31; 1 Tim 2:2). By bringing peace, Jesus encouraged the church. They could continue their mission, and we can continue the same mission today, because Jesus is always with us to make sure the mission is accomplished (Matt 28:19–20).

THINK ABOUT IT

The persecutor became the persecuted.



Lesson Outline

Jesus spreads His name through the people He chooses.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Jesus protected Christians from Saul (9:1–9, 31).
2. Jesus made Saul a Christian (9:3–19).
3. Jesus used Saul to make more Christians (9:20–30).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Jesus defeated the persecutor of His gospel (9:1–9).
 - Saul was the fiercest persecutor (9:1–2).
 - Jesus stopped Saul by calling and convicting him (9:3–9).
2. Jesus made him a witness to His gospel (9:10–19).
 - Jesus chose Saul as His special instrument for the gospel (9:10–16).
 - Saul believed and was transformed by the Spirit (9:17–19).
3. Jesus proclaimed and protected His gospel (9:20–31).
 - Saul witnessed and suffered in Damascus (9:20–25).
 - Saul witnessed and suffered in Jerusalem (9:26–30).
 - Saul's conversion brought peace to the church (9:31).





Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **Who was trying to kill Christians?**
Saul.
2. **Who appeared to Saul near Damascus?**
Jesus.
3. **What did Saul call Jesus?**
Lord.
4. **What did Jesus call Saul?**
“My chosen instrument”—Jesus was going to use Saul to tell others about Jesus.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **Why was Saul going to Damascus?**
To arrest and kill Christians.
2. **How did Jesus call Saul to faith?**
Jesus caused Saul to realize just who He is—Lord, Son of God, and Messiah.
3. **How did Jesus convict Saul of his sin?**
Jesus allowed Saul to see that what Saul thought was a good thing (persecuting Christians) was actually a very terrible thing (attacking God).
4. **How did Jesus convert Saul?**
Jesus led him to have faith and caused him to be spiritually reborn by the Holy Spirit.
5. **Why did Jesus say Saul was persecuting Him?**
Believers are the body of Christ, so persecuting believers is persecuting Jesus.
6. **Who did Jesus use to equip Saul to be His chosen instrument?**
Ananias came and prayed so that Saul was filled with the Spirit and regained his sight. Ananias also baptized Saul.
7. **How did Barnabas know Saul's faith was real?**
By how boldly Saul proclaimed Jesus and suffered for Him.
8. **How did Jesus protect His church?**
By ending Saul's persecution, Jesus allowed the church to have a time of peace.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



CANNOT SEE

In today's lesson, Israel demands a king from Samuel. Although asking for a king was not wrong in itself, God warned Israel about the dangers of having a king. Like many other things, a king could bring both good and harm. Bring a number of objects to class and ask the children whether they are good or bad (knife, medicine, food, stick, money, matches, handcuffs, etc.). These things can be either helpful or harmful, depending on who uses them and how they are used. God warned Israel that their kings would ultimately bring them harm rather than good.

ROAD THROUGH CLASS

Since today's story takes place on a road, use tape to make a road that runs through the middle of the class. Have children sit on both sides of the road during the lesson. You might also use this road to set the scene if acting out the lesson.



CHOSEN VESSEL

A vessel is some type of pot or container. Certain vessels were chosen for special jobs, like carrying water. God calls Paul a chosen vessel because He selected Paul to do a specific job. God is comparing a person to a pot to show that He chose Paul specifically, and that He picked Him for a specific reason. Bring in an assortment of cups, and ask the children which one they would choose if they needed a cup to drink from that day.

BASKETS

The basket Paul was let down in was a large woven hamper often used for hay, straw, or bales of wool (Acts 9:25). Bring in a basket large enough for the children to sit in, and use it during the lesson to illustrate Paul's escape from Damascus. You might also tie a rope to the basket and hang it over a table or study chair to raise and lower it (not with the children in it). Let children put something in the basket, like stuffed animals or dolls, and pull these up and unload them.



SAUL'S EYE-GLASSES

See *Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheet, cardstock, crayons, tape, scissor, straws.

Directions: Photocopy the craft page on cardstock. Color the sunglasses. Tape the straw to the bow of the sunglasses and tape it to the lens of the sunglasses. Tape the black lens to the glasses.

Saul's Eye-Glasses
See *Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2*



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

Saul is converted • Acts 9:1–31



AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

REPETITION

It has been said that repetition is the key to learning. Have the children ever been told something multiple times? Did it help them understand it better? In today's lesson, we are going to learn about Saul's conversion from an enemy of God to a lover of God. However, today's lesson is not the only place in the Bible that contains a description of Saul's conversion. It is described two more times in the book of Acts (22:1–21; 26:9–20)! His conversion has much to teach us about the nature of salvation and God's grace toward sinners.

U-TURN

Bring a U-turn sign to class. Repentance involves a complete U-turn: it is a complete change of direction, from serving self and seeking sin to serving Christ and submitting to Scripture. While this change is evident in the life of every Christian, it is more easily seen in the lives of some Christians. The life of the man in today's lesson provides one of the most dramatic examples of a U-turn ever recorded: the apostle Paul. The man who stood by while Stephen was murdered for his faith became a minister of the gospel. The great persecutor of the church became the persecuted.



ILLUSTRATE

CHOSEN TOOL

Bring a tool to class. Ask the children if they know what it is and what it is used for. Ask who gets to decide how it's used. Who is in charge: the tool, or the person using the tool? Explain that this is the way Jesus spoke about Saul: Saul would be His chosen instrument (Acts 9:15). Jesus is in charge of the church's mission to evangelize, and He was going to use Saul to accomplish a big part of that mission.

LAYING ON OF HANDS

In today's lesson, Ananias lays his hands on Paul (Acts 9:17). This action showed his affirmation of and support for Paul's conversion. A modern-day example would be putting your arms around someone's shoulders.



APPLY

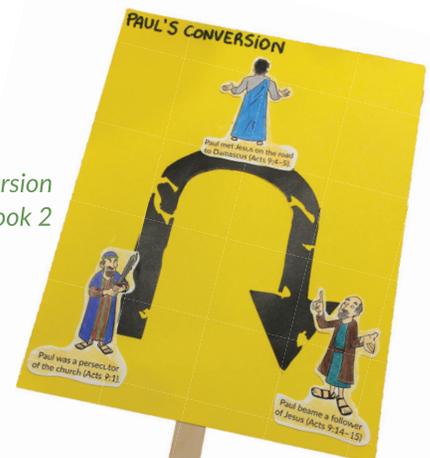
SAUL'S CONVERSION

See *Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheets, Yellow cardstock, crayons, glue stick, scissors.

Directions: Color the images with crayons. Tape the "U-turn" sign on a yellow cardstock. Cut the images and tape them on the cardstock following the order of the events in Saul's conversion.

Saul's Conversion
See *Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2*



AGES 9–11



FROM ENEMY TO FRIEND

Do any of the children know who wrote the lyrics to the beloved hymn, “Amazing Grace”? They were written by John Newton, the unlikeliest of authors. John Newton lived a life of rebellion and open sin. As a young man, he worked on a slave ship, capturing slaves to sell to the plantations of the New World. Eventually, he became the captain of his own slave ship. However, God miraculously saved him through a frightening storm at sea and a Christian devotional work he was reading, “Imitation of Christ” by Thomas á Kempis. As a result, he left the slave trade and became a leader in the church in England. As amazing as his conversion is, today we are going to see an even more stunning example of God making one of His enemies His friend.

A CHOSEN INSTRUMENT

Show the children different pictures (or recordings) of instruments you normally hear in an orchestra. See if they are able to correctly identify them. Point out that even the obscurest instruments have a part to play. In today’s lesson, we are going to learn about the part Saul—God’s chosen instrument—had to play in spreading the gospel.



EXERCISE AND REST

Bring a dumbbell to class. Explain that lifting weights is good, but so also is rest. In order for the muscle to grow properly, it must be given rest after being exercised to that it can grow and repair. This is why weightlifters often exercise one group of muscles on one day, and another group of muscles the next day. This allows for periods of rest. And just as exercise and rest are both necessary for a healthy body, so times of persecution and peace both contribute to a healthy church. God had allowed the church to experience persecution (Acts 8:1), but now He granted the church rest and peace in order that it might grow in spiritual maturity (9:31).

TEAMMATES

Have you ever noticed what happens when one player from one team mistreats or harms another player from the opposing team? The rest of the team normally gets involved! The teammates of the mistreated player rush to his aid. Because of the bond shared by teammates, attacking one of them is like attacking all of them. This is somewhat like what happens in today’s lesson when Jesus tells Saul that he is persecuting Him (Acts 9:4).



YOUR DAMASCUS ROAD

Share your testimony with the children. Be sure to mention the people and events that God used to convince you of your sin and your need of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. It is likely that your testimony differs greatly from Saul’s, and this will provide an opportunity to talk about how every salvation testimony—usual or unusual—shares many of the same elements: conviction over sin, humility before God, repentance of sins, trust in Jesus, and a newfound excitement and joy in obeying God. If appropriate, you might ask one of the children in your class to share his or her testimony (be sure to ask them well in advance so that they have time to prepare). Finally, challenge the children to think about their salvation testimony. Do they have one? How is it different from Saul’s? How is it similar?