

Bible Stories for Adults

Saul Converted

Acts 9:1-31

Opening

Gathering: Why does God select sin-filled people to be His ambassadors and do His work?

Today's Focus: In His grace, God called a great enemy of His church to become a great tool of His church.

Key Verses: *This man is my chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles.* Acts 9:15

You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. Acts 22:-15

Opening Prayer

Lesson

Clothes at the Feet (Acts 7:55-8:1a)

When is the first we hear of Saul? = *Young man* - thought to be in his 20s

Acts 7:55-58 = He stood and watched the Jews stone Stephen

Was Saul just a bystander to Stephen's stoning or was he involved in any way?

Acts 7:59-8:1a = To approve of Stephen's death, he had at least seen the Sanhedrin trial

What had caused Stephen to get into so much trouble with the Jewish leaders?

Acts 6:9-10, 12 = He won debate in a synagogue for Jews of Cyrene, Alex, Cilicia, Asia

Could Saul have been one of the debaters that opposed Stephen?

Acts 21:39 = Yes, he was from Cilicia and may have attended that synagogue

Did Saul give casual approval to this Christian persecution or did he become an advocate?

Acts 8:3 = He became a vicious leader - verb describes an animal devouring its prey

Why would Saul do this? = Supported execution of Christians

Acts 26:9-10 = He was convinced he should do everything possible to stop this heresy

Why would he go to such extremes as arresting and persecuting both men and women?

Numbers 25:1-5 = God's punishment for worshipping other gods was death

Saul's Teacher (Acts 5:17-40)

What do we know about Saul's upbringing? = He was trained by famous rabbi Gamaliel

Acts 22:3 = A Jew born in Tarsus but raised in Jerusalem

What do we know about Gamaliel? = Recognized as a top rabbi of the time

Acts 5:27-29, 33-34 = He was a Pharisee member of the Sanhedrin, teacher, *honored by all*

Was Gamaliel as staunchly opposed to this group of Jesus followers as was his student Saul?

Acts 5:35-40 = No, in fact he was concerned that doing so could oppose God

A Pharisee Named Saul (Acts 26:4-5)

Why would Saul be so zealous against Christians while his teacher was so careful?

Acts 26:4-5 = He had been raised his whole life as a strict Pharisee

Why would he have been raised his entire life as a Pharisee?

Acts 23:6 = His father was a Pharisee

But Gamaliel was a Pharisee. Why was Paul so strongly against the Christians?

Galatians 1:13-14 = He was intense and extremely zealous about everything he did

Was Paul this way due to the rawness of youth or was he honestly trying to please God?

Philippians 3:3-6 = He tried to please God, as obedient to the law as a man can be

Bible Stories for Adults

Saul Converted

Page 2

The Scattered Church (Acts 8)

What happened to this fledgling group of Christians when they were scattered by the persecution?

Acts 8:1b, 4 = They took the gospel out with them, no longer just in Jerusalem

How well did the gospel spread even though the apostles stayed in Jerusalem?

Acts 8:5, 12 = The Spirit worked through all Christians, not just the apostles

Were the apostles at all involved in this outward expansion?

Acts 8:14, 17, 25 = They supported others' ministries and did mission work themselves

Was this expansion just happening in Samaria?

Acts 8:26-27, 34-35, 38, 40 = Philip also witnessed in desert to an Ethiopian, baptized

Anywhere else? = Certainly many others not recorded

Acts 9:32, 35, 42 = Peter witnessed and made believers in Lydda, Joppa and Sharon area

Acts 10:24, 44, 48 = Peter witnessed and baptized Gentiles in Caesarea

Looking for the Way (Acts 9:1-2)

Did the persecutors realize that many Christians had moved out of town? = 170 miles, 8-9 days

Acts 9:1-2 = Yes, Saul made a special trip to round up disciples in Damascus

Why is the church called The Way instead of Christian?

Acts 11:26c = The name Christian came at least 13 years later in Antioch

If Christians called themselves The Way, what did the Jews call them?

Acts 24:5, 14a = The sect of the Nazarenes

Did the Sanhedrin agree with Saul's request for letters to the Damascus synagogues?

Acts 22:4-5 = Yes, they gave him the letters and he went hunting

Was this trip to Damascus Saul's first (and only) hunting trip outside of Jerusalem?

Acts 26:11-12 = No, he had worked in Jerusalem and in other foreign cities

Damascus - The oldest still-inhabited city on the world, already ancient in Abraham's days

Now Capital of Syria, Then Capital of Nabatean Arabs, always a choice target for armies

An oasis between Mt. Hermon and Syrian desert, 2000 ft elevation, nice climate

Divided in half by Straight Street which runs east-west; still a major thoroughfare

A mile-long colonnaded street, center road for traffic, wide sidewalks for market

Had a large Jewish population with 30-40 synagogues

I Saw the Light (Acts 9:3-5)

What happened as he got close to the city of Damascus?

Acts 9:3 = *A light from heaven flashed around him*

How bright was this light?

Acts 26:13 = Looked brighter than the sun, even at high noon

What did Saul do when he saw this light? = Asked "Who are you, sir?" - *Lord* was like *sir*

Acts 9:4-5 = He fell to the ground, heard a voice call his name twice to get attention

Opposing God (Acts 26:14-15)

Why did Jesus say that Saul was persecuting Him?

Luke 10:16 = *He who rejects you rejects Me*

How did Paul come to understand this in an even deeper way?

Ephesians 5:29-30 = Church is Christ's body, persecuting the church persecutes Jesus

How did Jesus emphasize that Saul was opposing God? = Useless resistance, ox only hurts itself

Acts 26:14-15 = *Kicking against the goads* was a Greek proverb about fighting a god

Bible Stories for Adults

Saul Converted

Page 3

Sudden Surrender (Acts 9:6-9)

Did Saul answer Jesus' question?

Acts 9:6 = No, Jesus wanted Saul to think about it, not answer

Did Jesus say anything else to Saul other than to go to Damascus and wait for instructions?

Acts 26:16-18 = He told Saul he was chosen to bring the good news to others

What did Saul's traveling companions think about what had happened?

Acts 9:7-8 (22:9) = They saw the light (22:9) and heard the sound but didn't understand it

What did Saul do in Damascus and how was it like a death of his old self?

Acts 9:9 = He waited 3 days without food or drink - a man was fully dead after 3 days

God Works Both Ends (Acts 9:10-19)

How did God work both ends of His plan for Saul as He did with Peter and Cornelius?

Acts 9:10-12 = He gave visions to Ananias and Saul about each other

What did Ananias think about his special calling by God to induct the greatest missionary ever?

Acts 9:13-14 = He was afraid to go to Saul because of his reputation of persecution

How did God explain to Ananias that he had to go? = Summary verse of Paul's ministry

Acts 9:15-16 = He explained Saul's special purpose to take the gospel to the Gentiles

Did Ananias give four other reasons for not going like Moses did (Exodus 3:1-4:17)?

Acts 9:17 = No, he went obediently and told Saul why he came

What else did he say that isn't recorded here? = Be His witness ... of what you have seen and heard

Acts 22:12-16 = He told Saul what God had planned for him, invited him to be baptized

What did Saul think about this Christian coming to him like this?

Acts 9:18-19a = He became a Christian himself when he was given sight

What sight was Saul really given and what scales really fell from his eyes?

2 Corinthians 4:4 = He was able to see the light of the gospel, not blinded by unbelief

Days in Damascus (Acts 9:20-25)

What did Saul do over the several days he spent with the disciples in Damascus?

Acts 9:19b-22 = He visited all the synagogues preaching that Jesus was the Messiah

Having been a Pharisee and a persecution leader, was Saul effective in bringing Jews to Christ?

Acts 9:23 = Maybe some, was effective in upsetting them enough to want to kill him

What happened? = City walls contained homes, could ride a chariot along the top (Jericho)

Acts 9:24-25 = He escaped at night through a window of a house in the city wall

Was this threat against his life kept secret from the authorities?

2 Corinthians 11:32-33 = No, the governor had a warrant out for his arrest

Arabian Nights (Galatians 1:15-18)

Had Saul stayed in Damascus for the entire time mentioned in Acts 9:20-25?

Galatians 1:15-17 = No, he spent a lot of time in the surrounding Arabian country

How long are the *many days* that Acts 9:23 tells us he spent around Damascus?

Galatians 1:18 = 3 years, then went to Jerusalem for 15 days

Bible Stories for Adults

Saul Converted

Page 4

A Couple of Weeks in Jerusalem (*Acts 9:26-31*)

What congratulations did Saul receive after three years of witnessing around Damascus?

Acts 9:26 = They were all afraid of him, just as Ananias had been

Who stepped in on Saul's behalf?

Acts 9:27-28 (4:36-37) = Joseph Barnabas (*Son of Encouragement*)

Why didn't Saul stay longer than 15 days in Jerusalem?

Acts 9:29-30 = Jews wanted to kill him, so he went to Caesarea, then Tarsus

Was Saul just too nervous from his Damascus experience and gave up on Jerusalem too early?

Acts 22:17-21 = No, he left at the Lord's command to go preach to the Gentiles

Did Saul get to meet all of the apostles during his two week stay?

Galatians 1:19-20 = No, only Peter and Jesus' brother, James

Why does Paul point out he only saw these two for 15 days three years after his conversion?

Galatians 1:11-12 = He got gospel from Jesus independent of apostles, not made-up

Did this independent gospel threaten the church?

Acts 9:31 = No, it was all the same gospel, and God's gospel, so the church thrived

Antioch (*Acts 11:19-30*)

What did Saul likely do when he got home to Tarsus?

Galatians 1:21-24 = Witnessed in Syria and Cilicia, possibly Galatia and Cappadocia

After the stories of Peter spreading the gospel outward to Gentiles, what growth does Luke mention?

Acts 11:19-21 = Unnamed Christians went to Antioch and made disciples of Greeks

Antioch - 3rd largest city in the Roman empire (after Rome and Alexandria), over 500,000 population

Called "Antioch-on-the-Orontes" since on Orontes River and there were other Antiochs

300 miles north of Jerusalem, 20 miles east of Mediterranean Sea, 80 miles from Tarsus

What did the mother church in Jerusalem do when they heard of the believers in Antioch?

Acts 11:22-24 = They sent Barnabas to pastor the church

What did Barnabas do when he saw that he needed help in this large city?

Acts 11:25-26 = He found Saul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch

Why does this verse say their ministry only lasted a year?

Acts 11:27-30 = Barnabas and Saul went to Jerusalem with gifts for a famine

How long had Saul witnessed around Tarsus and Antioch? = Jerusalem Council was 14 yrs later

Galatians 2:1 = Paul's journeys didn't start until at least 11 years after becoming a Christian

Closing Prayer

Response - Consider and meditate on one each day this week

1. When have I committed myself to something without first seeking God's will?
(*Acts 9:1-5; 26:9; 1 Kings 22:1-28; Psalm 119:2; Matthew 6:31-33; 7:7-8*)
2. When have I committed myself to something that later was clearly against God's will?
(*Acts 9:1-5; 22:2-8; 26:9-11; Number 16; 1 Samuel 15; 2 Samuel 11-12*)
3. When have I committed myself to something that was clearly in line with God's will?
(*Acts 9:20-22; 22:14-16, 21; 26:15-20; Genesis 6:9; Joshua 24:14-27; 1 Kings 3:4-15; Neh. 1:1-2:9*)
4. What have I recognized to be God's calling for my life?
(*Acts 9:6, 15; 22:14-15, 21; 26:15-20; Exodus 3:10; Deut 31:23; Esther 4:12-16; John 21:15-17*)
5. How have I encouraged others in their ministry? (*Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-28; 11:19-30; 13:15; 15:32; Genesis 14:18-20; Exodus 17:8-18:27; 1 Thessalonians 3:2; 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:25*)