

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*)