

Saul (Paul) Becomes a Christian



Scripture Reference: [Acts 9:1-31](#)

Suggested Theme: God chooses all kinds of people to do His will. When we choose to follow Him, we should repent and live God's way.

Memory Verse: "So you must change your hearts and lives! Come back to God, and he will forgive your sins." [Acts 3:19, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

Saul (later known by his Roman name, Paul) threatened and hurt followers of Jesus. On the way to persecute disciples in Damascus, Saul encountered Jesus, who changed his life. Following his baptism, Saul immediately began preaching the truth about Jesus. This led to the Jews in Damascus plotting to kill him. Saul escaped one night when the disciples snuck him over the city walls in a basket. Saul was unsafe even when he went to Jerusalem. Jesus wholly and immediately changed Saul's life. He continued to preach about Jesus for the rest of his life and often suffered because of it.

Background Study:

[Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts](#)

Saul will later be known by his Roman name, Paul, but he is first introduced in Acts by his Jewish name, Saul.

Paul would later re-tell his conversion story to other audiences.

- He addressed a Jewish crowd during his arrest in Jerusalem ([Acts 22:1-21](#)).
- Then again, before King Agrippa in [Acts 26:9-20](#).

The New Testament contains many writings that were eventually produced by the man later known as the Apostle Paul. These writings are in the form of epistles, or letters, to churches and individuals. Reading these letters reveals much about Saul, but it is in Acts that we read how he was personally visited by Jesus and assigned the task of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Saul's Background:

Saul was born in Tarsus but grew up in Jerusalem. He studied under the best Jewish teachers, including the well-respected teacher Gamaliel ([Acts 22:3](#)).

The first time Saul is mentioned in the New Testament is in [Acts 7:58 and 8:1](#). Saul stood in approval of the [Stoning of Stephen](#) and went so far as to watch after the clothes of those who threw the stones.

After that, Saul became zealous in stamping out this new group of people (called "The Way"), but no matter how Saul and others persecuted those who followed Jesus, the group kept growing in momentum and numbers.

Saul was zealous for the faith and traditions of the Jewish people. His zealousness drove him to attempt to stamp out the followers of Jesus violently, even to Damascus.

Saul Encountered Jesus:

Up to this time, Saul had been propelled by a belief that Jesus was dead and insignificant. Jews involved in this “Jesus problem” needed to be stopped.

Everything Saul zealously believed was proven wrong instantly when the resurrected Jesus appeared before him on the road to Damascus. Now, Saul was an actual witness to the fact that Jesus was alive.

Jesus confronted Saul about the way he had been persecuting believers. Jesus considered the persecution of His followers as a persecution of Himself. When Saul hurt Christians, Jesus felt the pain. Years later, Saul explained that Christians are the “body of Christ, and each is a part of it.” ([1 Corinthians 12:27](#)).

This was not a vision. Jesus actually appeared before Saul. Jesus appointed Saul as an Apostle, and being with Jesus was a prerequisite for that role. The legitimacy of Saul’s later work and writings rests on this encounter. Read more at [1 Corinthians 9:1](#), [1 Corinthians 15:3-11](#) and [Galatians 1:11-16](#).

Saul and the Early Church:

Saul was not the only one who had to shift in thinking. The opening words of Acts chapter nine, “*Saul was still trying to frighten the followers of the Lord by saying he would kill them,*” provide a glimpse of the reputation Saul would have had among believers. If Jesus had not come to Ananias in a vision in Damascus, then Ananias would certainly not have risked his life to meet Saul. Jesus directed him to find Saul at a home on [Straight Street](#). This street still exists today in Old Damascus.

There were plenty of visions going around that day. At the same time, Ananias had a vision that instructed him to go to Straight Street. Saul had a vision telling him to expect a visit from a disciple called Ananias.

Now, the great persecutor of the church finally understood that Jesus was the Messiah, the true King of Israel and the world and that everyone needed to hear about Him. At this point of understanding, Saul regained his sight and was baptised. This event must have remained solid in his memory for years when he preached and wrote reflections on salvation throughout his letters to churches.

Saul would have been a real enigma. The synagogue leaders would have been confused by this educated Jewish leader now seeming to speak in favour of the very thing he had so recently been militant about. And the followers of Jesus would surely have been fearful and sceptical of a man who had been terrorising their fellow believers.

Although this section reads as a continuous narrative, it is probable that during the three years following his conversion, Saul left Damascus for Arabia and returned to Damascus again before leaving for Jerusalem. The three years in Arabia could fit between verses 22 and 23. He later recounts the sequence of events in a letter to the churches of Galatia ([Galatians 1:11-18](#)).

Saul returned to a very angry situation after his three years in Arabia. We learn in one of his later letters that the governor in Damascus had the city guarded so they could arrest Saul ([2 Corinthians 11:32-33](#)). A wall surrounded the city, so Saul’s followers put him in a basket and lowered him out through a window in the wall.

Saul attempted to join the disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem but needed the help of Barnabas to convince others to accept him. Barnabas took him to the apostles and spoke on Saul’s behalf. (Read more about Barnabas and Saul in the stories like the [Antioch Church](#) and [Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey](#))

Saul stayed under the protection of the apostles. His background and education allowed him to move into more educated circles and even participate in debates about Jesus. There was soon so much angry opposition against Saul that the followers of Jesus again had to get him out of the city. They sent him to Tarsus.

Persecution had scattered many followers of Jesus, and they shared the message of Jesus wherever they went. Now, there was a period of peace. The Way, or Jesus-movement, grew in numbers during this time.

Way to Introduce the Story:

“What would you do if you heard that there was someone in our town who was trying to hurt all Christians? We might have to meet in secret places. If you heard that that person was close by what would you do? You might have to use secret codes to tell other Christians where to meet. Has anyone ever seen a fish symbol like this? (Draw it on the board) Christians used to use that secret symbol to represent Jesus. That way mean people didn’t know what they were talking about. In the book of Acts we read about many people who became followers of Jesus or, in other words, Christians. There were also some people who got very angry that anyone would follow Jesus. One man, Saul, got so angry that he even killed followers of Jesus.”

The Story:

Saul was born in the city of Tarsus, but he grew up in Jerusalem. Saul was very intelligent and had studied under a famous teacher named Gamaliel.

Saul had two names. His Jewish name was “Saul,” and his Roman name was “Paul.”

Even though Saul believed in God, he did not follow Jesus. He was an enemy to people who followed Jesus.

Saul hated these followers of Jesus and wanted to destroy the church. He even dragged men and women out of their houses and put them in prison for believing in Jesus. Another way to say you are hurting or threatening people for what they believe is to say you are “persecuting” them. Saul persecuted these disciples of Jesus. Everywhere, they were very afraid of him.

Once, Saul asked the High Priest in Jerusalem for letters to take them to the Jewish leaders in Damascus. He thought the leaders would hate these followers of Jesus, too. He thought they could help him arrest all of them there.

So Saul set out for the city of Damascus. Something unexpected happened as he and his companions walked along the road to Damascus. A bright light shone down, and everyone stopped.

The light was so bright that it made Saul blind. The others in the group saw the light and could hear something, but only Paul could hear a voice that said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Paul was blind, but he could hear the voice. “Who are you?” he asked.

Then he heard the answer, “I am Jesus, and you have been persecuting Me. Now get up and go into the city.”

Saul was shocked. This was Jesus? But he thought Jesus was dead! Now Saul knew the truth: Jesus was alive!

And that was not all. Jesus had asked Saul, “Why are you persecuting ME?”

Saul had been saying to everyone that Jesus was dead. He persecuted these followers of Jesus and even threw them in prison. But now he knew he had been wrong all of this time. They belong to Jesus, so when Paul had been persecuting them, it was actually like hurting Jesus Himself.

What would happen to Saul? Would Jesus ever forgive him for what he had done? If he changed, would Jesus’ followers ever forgive him? Can people ever forgive a man who had done such bad things? Saul had many things to think about.

But Saul needed help. He could not even see where he was going. Since Saul was blind, the others who were with him led him to the city of Damascus.

Meanwhile, in another part of the city, there was a man called Ananias. He believed in Jesus.

Jesus came to Ananias in a vision and said that Ananias should go and meet Saul. He would be waiting in a house on the main road through Damascus called "Straight Street."

Now it was Ananias' time to be shocked! Visit Saul? Saul was the man who was persecuting people who believed in Jesus. How could Jesus ask him to go to see Saul? Ananias was very frightened. What would Saul do to him?

But, in the vision, Jesus told Ananias that He had chosen Saul to do a very important job. Jesus had chosen Saul to be the teacher to the Gentiles (all of the people who were not Jews).

So, Ananias obeyed Jesus. He went to Straight Street and found Saul. He touched Saul and said, "Brother Saul, Jesus, the one who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so you can see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

As soon as Ananias said this, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. Then he got up and was baptised.

Now that Saul knew the truth about Jesus, he wanted to tell everyone. He preached to the people in Damascus. Many people began to believe in Jesus when they heard Saul preach.

But not everyone was happy Saul was preaching about Jesus. Some were very angry. They began guarding the city gates to catch and kill Saul if he tried to leave the city.

But Saul's friends had a great idea. Late one night, they put Saul in a basket and lowered it over the wall. Saul escaped!

The followers of Jesus in Damascus had begun to trust Saul, but many followers in other places still remembered how he had once been their enemy. When Saul returned to Jerusalem, the followers there did not trust Saul and did not want him to be with them.

But Saul continued to do what Jesus had told him to do. He was a very different person now. When he used to live in Jerusalem, he told people NOT to follow Jesus. Now, he told them that they SHOULD follow Jesus. Jesus changed Saul.

But over and over, Saul made people angry. Finally, the other followers took Saul to the port of Caesarea and put him on a ship heading to Tarsus. Tarsus was the city Saul had grown up in.

After this time, there was a time of peace for the churches. Many more people began to follow Jesus.

Even though Saul had done horrible things and persecuted Jesus, God wanted to work through him to share the gospel. God can work through anyone to do His will!

After Saul met Jesus, he changed. His heart changed. His life changed. He stopped doing bad things and followed Jesus. What do you think Jesus wants you to do?

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#), or [click here to download the pictures to print](#).

Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Or use the video below.

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalize its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

Review:

1. What is Saul's other name? (Paul)
2. Before becoming a follower of Jesus, what did Saul do? (He searched out and killed people who followed Jesus)
3. What happened to Saul on the road to Damascus? (Jesus came to him in a bright light and blinded him)
4. What did Jesus say to Saul? ('Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 'Get up and go into the city and you will be told what to do')
5. How did Ananias know to meet with Saul? (The Lord came to him in a vision, telling him to meet with Saul and heal him)
6. Who healed and baptised Saul? (Ananias)
7. How did Saul escape from Damascus? (Followers of Jesus lowered him over the city walls at night in a basket)
8. What do you think Ananias learned from this experience?

Reflection:

1. How do you think Saul felt when he became blind?
2. How do you think Saul felt when he realized he had been sinning by sending Christians to prison?
3. Why do you think Jesus came to Saul in such a dramatic way?
4. Why do you think the Lord gave Ananias a vision telling him to meet with and heal Saul?
5. If you were Saul, would you have listened to Jesus and went into the city?
6. If you were Ananias, would you have trusted God and met with Saul, even though he had been persecuting Christians?
7. Jesus convicted Saul to stop sinning by persecuting Christians. Is there something Jesus is convicting you to stop doing?
8. What is something you are confused about in this story?
9. What is something you wonder about in this story?
10. Why do you think God chose to have Saul share the good news to non-Jews, since Saul was a Jew?
11. Jesus wanted to use Saul to share the good news and do wonderful things with God, even though he was very sinful. Do you think Jesus could do wonderful things through you? Is there something you think God has encouraged you to do for Him?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [Jesus Hokey Pokey Song](#)
- [Deep and Wide Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Have children act out situations in which they must admit they are wrong.
- Decorate any food container (ice cream, margarine tub, etc.) to look like a basket.
- If you can access Google Maps, Google Earth, or an Atlas, look up Damascus and find the probable location of Straight Street, where Ananias went to see Saul. The modern name for the street in Old Damascus is “The Avenue of Bab Sharqi and Medhat Pasha Souq.” Talk about how modern Damascus differs from Damascus when Saul was converted.
- To review, you or the children can draw a large outline of Paul on a whiteboard or piece of paper (even drawing with a stick in the sand works fine if you are outside). Then, after you have taught the lesson, ask the children to think about what they have just learned from the Bible. Have them write descriptive words or draw pictures inside and around the outlined illustration of Paul. When you see what the children are writing or drawing, you may be surprised or encouraged by what insights they have picked up from the story. This is also a good opportunity to correct or add to anything you might not have covered as well as you could have when you were teaching.



If you prefer, you can [download and print the illustration of Paul provided here](#) and then have the children write and draw on it for the review.

- Alternatively, if you are teaching a series of lessons about Paul, you might draw an outline of him on a large poster or paper and then add descriptive words about him each time you study a new lesson.
- [Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together.](#)



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Do a weaving project to make a basket.



Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).

- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page with text \(Ministry Spark\)](#)
- [Craft: Doorknob hanger \(Sunday school crafts\)](#)
- [A worksheet, Crossword puzzle \(Sermon 4 kids\)](#)
- [Review: Create a “passport” that covers Paul’s life. Good visual ideas and activities. Could be split up to go with several lessons or taught all together as a review of previous lessons concerning Paul \(Kids Bible Deb Jackson\)](#)
- [Visual Aid: Colour pictures cover both Philip and the Ethiopian and the story of Saul’s conversion \(Acts 9\) \(It is in pdf. and can be viewed on-screen. However, I found it easier to save it to my computer and then view it.\) \(Bible for children\)](#)
- [Room Decorations: A wall scene that depicts the basket being lowered down the city wall of Damascus. You’ll have to scroll down the page \(Kids Bible Deb Jackson\)](#)

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Date

