

## Saul's Conversion

**Lesson Scope:** Acts 9:1-31

### Lesson Focus

Our introduction to Saul shows a young man who had authority and influence (Acts 7:58). He describes his early life in his defense to the Jews in chapter 22 and to King Agrippa in chapter 26. Saul was an orthodox-practicing Jew of high training. He was trusted and commissioned by the high priest and had the zeal to get a job done.

The Jewish leaders needed such a person in what they felt was a crisis at Jerusalem. The new sect of believers was growing at a phenomenal rate. Three thousand were saved at Pentecost, and soon it was five thousand men (Acts 4:4), followed by unspecified multitudes (Acts 5:14).

Paul described his attitude and activities at this time as violent and mad (Acts 22:4). He was busy traveling far and near, binding and putting believers into prison, causing them to blaspheme, giving his word at their deaths, and causing great distress to the Christians. Few would have imagined that Saul was a candidate for conversion. But God, who knows the hearts of all men, extends grace to the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

Unregenerate man is at enmity with God and His people. But when a man yields to Jesus Christ, he becomes a useful vessel in God's hands.

In this lesson we focus on the change that takes place in Christian experience when "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). A new creature in Christ Jesus is for young and old alike.

A common question is; how do we know when God calls us? Few have the dramatic call or change today that the apostle Paul experienced. The more common experience is what the three thousand experienced and responded to under the preaching of Peter at Pentecost (Acts 2:41-42). Then also their response was, "What shall we do?" True believers know conversion means a change of lifestyle. It is a grave error to think that we need only believe, and we can continue in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17).

We also need to refrain from telling our children that it is time for them to join church now. Their response must be to the Spirit's call. For some

youth, it may take longer, but it does need to be a spiritual work when it happens.

**Lesson Aim:** To identify characteristics of a genuine conversion.

**Theme Verse:** [John 3:3](#). Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

**Lesson Text.**

**Called**

[Acts 9:1-5](#) <sup>1</sup> And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, <sup>2</sup> And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: <sup>4</sup> And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? <sup>5</sup> And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

**Converted**

[Acts 9:6-18](#) <sup>6</sup> And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. <sup>7</sup> And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. <sup>8</sup> And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. <sup>10</sup> And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I *am here*, Lord. <sup>11</sup> And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, <sup>12</sup> And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting *his* hand on him, that he might receive his sight. <sup>13</sup> Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: <sup>14</sup> And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said unto him, Go

thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: <sup>16</sup> For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. <sup>17</sup> And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. <sup>18</sup> And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

### **Committed**

**Acts 9:19-20** <sup>19</sup> And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. <sup>20</sup> And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

**Acts 9:26-28** <sup>26</sup> And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

**Acts 9:31** <sup>31</sup> Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Called**

1. What traits of an unconverted man do we see in Saul?
2. What pricks did Saul kick against in resisting God's call?
3. Discuss different means that God uses to call souls today.

#### **Converted**

4. List some effects of conversion that we see in Saul.
5. Discuss the value of prayer and fasting.
6. What are some ways for us to serve as Ananias did?

#### **Committed**

7. What are the traits of a first love, and how should we keep it?
8. How can we avoid prejudice in an increasingly multicultural society?
9. What should we be doing while the church has rest?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

The expression breathing out (Acts 9:1) shows how Saul was bent on his course. He was animated by his passion to stamp out the faith of Jesus Christ. He had zeal for God but not according to the knowledge of God. Thus, he later said he was granted mercy because he did it ignorantly (1 Timothy 1:13).

The repetition of a person's name by the heavenly messenger indicates the importance of his message. It was thus to Abraham (Genesis 22:11), Moses (Exodus 3:4), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10), Peter (Luke 22:31), and now to Saul (Acts 9:4). Paul later appealed to this revelation of Jesus as the basis for his apostleship (1 Corinthians 15:8-10). Saul's kicking heel was, as it were, against an oxgoad, and he was only driving the pricks deeper. Despite his boldness, he was fighting the truth that was seeking to penetrate his conscience.

After scattering the saints at Jerusalem, he was traveling to distant places to oppose this way. But God causes even the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10). We see the Gospel going out according to the prescribed course: "Jerusalem... Judaea... Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

## **Principles and Applications Called**

1. Conversion begins with a call from God (Acts 9:3-4). "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). The Scriptures also say, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Therefore, we know the chosen ones are those who respond to God's call. This call often comes through our conscience as the Word is preached and an invitation is given. Many times the Spirit also speaks in quiet meditations at night.

2. A genuine conversion experience requires an unreserved acceptance of the lordship of Christ (Acts 9:5-6). Few people are apprehended in as dramatic a way as was Saul, but through the Word, all need to learn the total commitment God requires for victory. Jesus must be our priority in life. Jesus said, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44). We must hate (love less) father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, and our own lives also to be His disciples (Luke 14:26).

## **Converted**

3. Prayer and self-denial are essential elements of a genuine conversion experience (Acts 9:9-11). "For, behold, he prayeth" is emphasized by the Lord as evidence of Saul's repentant spirit. He could now be led in the ways of righteousness. The truly saved continue in a repentant, believing, obedient life. This is the way of peace, joy, and abundant living.

4. Conversion is a supernatural change from evil to good (Acts 9:11-13). "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Saul changed from causing suffering to learning how much he would need to suffer for Jesus (Acts 9:16). When there is sin and failure in the church, a lack of regeneration is the problem. A sign of giving up the Gospel standard of righteous living is allowing moral failure to become common and excusing it as "just being realistic." Salvation takes a supernatural power and a supernatural change.

5. A genuine conversion issues into a life of dedicated service (Acts 9:15-16). Now "ye are not your own" but a "temple of the Holy Ghost" (1 Corinthians 6:19). There is an obvious difference in one who is saved and preparing for Christian service. He studies to show himself "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). This service is best given in action—on the job, helping those in need, singing for shut-ins, and so forth.

6. The truly converted desire to be baptized into Christ (Acts 9:18). The ordinances of the church, which may have seemed meaningless, are now sacred. Baptism symbolizes coming under the jurisdiction and leadership of Christ, as the children of Israel were "baptized unto Moses" (1 Corinthians 10:2). It is not a matter of being led or not, but of who will lead us (Romans 6:16). Jesus is the kind and merciful Saviour.

## **Committed**

7. Genuine conversion produces a spontaneous desire to testify for Jesus (9:20). When we are translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son, we have something to rejoice about. It is such good news we want others to experience the same deliverance. This is called the "first love" (Revelation 2:4).

8. The truly converted desire to be a part of the corporate body of Christ (Acts 9:26-28). Something is seriously wrong if one of our number moves to a distant location without first finding a suitable church there.

We cannot sanction various forms of "house worship" when a Scriptural

fellowship is available. The body of Christ must also give a warm, charitable welcome to all souls desiring salvation and fellowship.

9. A turn from darkness to light results in rest (Acts 9:31). Saul's leading role in the persecution was evident when persecution stopped upon his conversion. Rest and security are the result of people at peace with themselves, with their neighbors, and with God. Even in the face of persecution, the biggest conflict is over when we have made our peace with God. As Paul said, "Whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8).

### **Important Teachings**

1. Conversion begins with a call from God (Acts 9:3-4).
2. A genuine conversion experience requires an unreserved acceptance of the lordship of Christ (Acts 9:5-6).
3. Prayer and self-denial are essential elements of a genuine conversion experience (Acts 9:9-11).
4. Conversion is a supernatural change from evil to good (Acts 9:11-13).
5. A genuine conversion issues into a life of dedicated service (Acts 9:15-16).
6. The truly converted desire to be baptized into Christ (Acts 9:18).
7. Genuine conversion produces a spontaneous desire to testify for Jesus (Acts 9:20).
8. The truly converted desire to be a part of the corporate body of Christ (Acts 9:26-28).
9. A turn from darkness to light results in rest (Acts 9:31).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. What traits of an unconverted man do we see in Saul?

Animosity and persecution often come to the saints from unbelievers under conviction. Saul became violent toward the believers. Malice is often expressed by spreading slander and evil reports. Saul caused them to blaspheme (Acts 26:11) and committed them to prison. In worst cases, as with Saul, Satan moves men to physical abuse and murder.

2. What pricks did Saul kick against in resisting God's call?

In Saul's position, he should have had knowledge of the Scriptures, of Jesus' claims, and of the resurrection. He heard Stephen's dying prayer (Acts 7:60). Saul also had believing Christian relatives to prod him (Romans 16:7).

3. Discuss different means that God uses to call souls today.

Sudden events such as accidents, sickness, terminal illness, or the death of loved ones often are wake-up calls. The persistent work of the Holy Spirit is a frequent means of bringing men to salvation. God uses men to call others through "the foolishness of preaching" (1 Corinthians 1:21).

4. List some effects of conversion that we see in Saul. Saul was poor in spirit—trembling; he was asking to be led. He obeyed the direction he was given. He quite literally became blind to the things of this world as his spiritual sight was opened. He became devout instead of impious. He prayed.

5. Discuss the value of prayer and fasting.

Until we get serious enough to deny ourselves, some victories cannot be won. Cutting off our busy work schedule for prayer time frees our mind to learn God's will. An extended time of fasting puts our physical body in a state that creates a condition for change in emotion and intellect also.

6. What are some ways for us to serve as Ananias did?

We should always be ready to stop our work schedule to talk with a needy, seeking soul. We should not be intimidated by the most imposing opponent of the Gospel. We should also have our salvation message ready and accept those who receive salvation.

7. What are the traits of a first love, and how should we keep it?

A newly born-again soul has an open, honest expression of faith in Jesus Christ. With joy and earnestness, he endeavors to live for Jesus. He serves others rather than seeking to be served or taking the critic's position.

8. How can we avoid prejudice in an increasingly multicultural society?

We must be willing to share the Gospel message with an attitude of acceptance to all. When sin is renounced and a repentant, believing spirit is discerned, anyone can be received. God has made of one blood all nations.

9. What should we be doing while the church has rest?

We should be filling ourselves with all the knowledge of God. We will walk (live) in the fear of God, separate from the lustful, self-seeking society. This we do by magnifying the life in the Spirit. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). The Spirit does not speak of Himself but makes plain (interprets) the Word (John 16:13).

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

This amazing grace of God has been extolled by many men delivered from the depths of sin. Paul said he was "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but [he] obtained mercy.... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:13, 15).

John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, titled his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. John Newton wrote, "Amazing grace! how sweet the sound / That saved a wretch like me!" No matter how great the change a man may make, it is the work of God, and His mercy and grace are to be praised.

### **Research Guide**

1. Paul frequently refers to his early life and conversion. Read Acts 22:1-21; 26:1-16; 1 Timothy 1:12-16; 1 Corinthians 15:8-10.
2. Also study texts and cross-references on the change that comes at conversion and the true nature of New Testament Christian experience (Galatians 5:13-25; Colossians 3:1-10; 1 John 2:15-17).