

### *Saul Encounters Jesus*

1. If you were to vote for the person “most likely never to become a Christian” whom would you choose? Why?

We have been reading about the spread of the Gospel to Samaria and beyond. Now it had reached even beyond that—spreading all the way to Damascus, 120 miles to the north—this in spite of Saul's persecution! There is an irony here. In the chapter immediately before this we were told about Philip and the Ethiopian and how the Gospel was spreading to the south. Saul was concerned that the Gospel was spreading north. But while he was on his way north, God picked up Philip from Samaria and leap-frogged him over Saul, sending him down the Gaza road in the direction of the Ethiopian. Doesn't God's creativity make you smile?!

***Bow in Prayer:*** “Sovereign Lord, quiet our hearts that we may behold Your magnificent work of grace—the rebirth and total transformation of a human soul in one of Your choice instruments.”

***Read*** Acts 9:1-2. ***Read*** the handout “The Young Man Named Saul” for additional background.

2.
  - a. What do these verses, as well as the previous study, tell us about Saul and his relationship with the early believers?
  - b. What symbols of power does Saul have with him as he travels to Damascus?

Now ***read*** Acts 9:3-22 to get the rest of the story.

3. Looking at verses 3-9, who stopped Saul in his tracks? *Try to put yourself in the place of the eyewitnesses mentioned in verse 7.*
  - a. What do you see and hear (verses 3-6)?
  - b. What are you feeling (verse 7)?
  - c. How do you think Saul felt? Consider verse 8. Describe Saul's circumstance (verse 9).

*Saul certainly had a lot to think about during those three days as he pondered the full significance of this life changing experience. Also observe God's kindness to him in verse 12.*

4. What was the likely motivation for Saul's complete fast (going without food and water)?
  
5. Why do you think Jesus chose to meet Saul in such a dramatic way? What fact about Jesus was Saul forced to recognize (Acts 1:3)?
  
6.
  - a. Looking at Acts 9:10-19, how would you describe Ananias?
  
  - b. What does the Lord tell Ananias to do (9:11-12)?
  
  - c. Why did Ananias hesitate to carry out God's assignment (Acts 9:13-14)?
  
  - d. Thinking of the person you chose (in question #1) as the "most unlikely Christian," what would you do if Jesus came to you in a vision telling you to confront this person?
  
7. In verse 15 Jesus responds to Ananias's fear and objections by sharing His plans for Saul's life. What was to be Saul's destiny (Acts 9:15-16)?
  
8. Before Saul met the Lord on the road to Damascus, he was a high-ranking Pharisee. This meant that he had power and knowledge—probably the equivalent of a Ph.D. in Jewish law. If Saul was so well educated and so smart, why was he so ignorant about the truth of Jesus Christ? (See 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.)
  
9. What happens in verses 17-20 when Ananias is obedient to Jesus' call?

What began as a mission of persecution ended with the conversion of the persecutor! God turned the tables, bringing about one of the most important and dramatic events in the history of the church. Saul experienced a complete reversal in his whole outlook and his standing before God. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of Saul's conversion for the early church as well as ourselves. Without Paul there would be no New Testament as we know it. Thus, we should continually thank God for what He did in Saul's heart.

10. Now looking at Acts 8:1 through Acts 9:22, contrast the "old Saul" with the Saul who had been made a "new person" through the indwelling Spirit of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

*Before conversion*

*After conversion*

### ***Life Lessons***

11. Given Saul's selection as a key person in the vast kingdom of God, we might think that Peter or one of the other apostles should have been chosen to minister to this important new convert. But God called an unknown disciple named Ananias for this task. *We never know how God might use us to touch a life that will, in turn, touch millions.* **Discuss this important Life Lesson with your group.**
12. In this passage we have read the powerful story of an improbable convert. Think again of your choice for "the most unlikely Christian." From this passage, what have you learned that speaks to your doubts about their becoming a believer?

*Take a few minutes as a group to pray for the people you named.*

**Reread** Acts 9:23-31. On Map 3 locate Jerusalem, Damascus and Tarsus. This map details Paul's travels *before* his first missionary journey. By following the numbers on the map you will notice that Saul traveled from Damascus to Arabia where he spent 3 years before returning to Damascus. (See Galatians 1:13-18 for details.) Luke chose not to relate the account of Saul's trip to Arabia, but this is the time it most likely occurred. Scholars believe that Paul went to the Arabian desert to spend time alone with God.

13. When Saul returned for the second phase of his ministry in Damascus what did he encounter upon his return (Acts 9:23-25; 2 Corinthians 11:32-33)? What was he forced to do as a result?
14. How was the Lord's prediction in Acts 9:16 beginning to be fulfilled? Why do you think God's purposes for Saul included suffering? (Consult James 1:2-4 & 2 Corinthians 12:7.)

*The time had finally come for Saul to make his journey to Jerusalem as a newly “converted” man. **Stop and Think:** Don’t you wonder what they were saying in Jerusalem about the conversion of Saul? No doubt the Jews were alarmed and angry, feeling that their former leader had become a traitor. The Jewish Christians were probably deeply suspicious of the genuineness of his conversion, perhaps fearing some elaborate plot. Luke describes Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem in this way: Carefully **review** Acts 9:26-31 and Galatians 1:18.*

15. What happened when Saul tried to meet with the believers in Jerusalem?
  
16. Who stepped in to ensure Saul’s reception into the Christian community? In what way did he act as Paul’s encourager (Acts 9:27)?
  
17. Describe the role of an encourager. Is there someone in your life who needs your encouragement? *Ask God to point you to that person.*
  
18. What were the remaining days in Jerusalem like for Saul? (See Acts 9:28-30; 22:17-21.)

*Seven or eight years will pass by, during which we are given only the barest glimpse of Saul’s activities. He is being shaped and trained for yet more work, work that God was not in a hurry for him to do.*

19. What follows in Acts 9:31 is a beautiful summary of God’s blessing on the church. Contrast this with Acts 8:1. To what can we attribute the success of the early church? (Look at 9:31 carefully.) *Ask God to help you apply these truths to your life and witness.*

### **Wrap Up**

[Pull out Map 3 and trace Saul’s travels in this passage using a colored pencil—starting at Jerusalem and ending at Tarsus, following the numbers on the map.] At each location, *stop* and *reflect* on the supernatural work that was taking place in Saul’s life at that time.

20. What have you learned about the sovereign grace of God from observing Saul’s life? In what ways has this passage altered your thinking about God?

## *The Young Man Named Saul*

### *Acts 9:1-31 – Lesson 10*

As a native of **Tarsus**, a well known university city in the Roman province of Cilicia, Saul had many opportunities to become acquainted with various Greek philosophies and religious cults during his youth there. The university at Tarsus rivaled those of Athens and Alexandria. Yet Saul of Tarsus was born a Jew and was captivated by the religion of his fathers, rather than the paganism of the Greek gods. The Hebrew name given him by his parents was Saul, but because his father was a Roman citizen (and therefore Saul inherited Roman citizenship), Saul also had the Latin name Paul (Acts 16:37, 22:25-28), the custom of dual names being common in those days. Since he grew up in a strict Jewish environment, the name Saul was by far the more appropriate name to go by. But after his conversion and call from God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, he dusted off his Roman name and became known as Paul, a name Gentiles were accustomed to.

As a Jew he had an impeccable pedigree. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and his name reflects that tribe's most famous person, Israel's first King—Saul. Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee, a mark of distinction among the best of the Hebrews from the Jewish point of view; and unusual for a man living in Tarsus. Perhaps Saul began to call himself a Pharisee after he spent time in Jerusalem studying under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel—the greatest Jewish teacher of that time.

With a brilliant mind and a commanding knowledge of Greek philosophy and the Jewish religion, he could debate with the most educated scholars of his day. At the same time, his clear, understandable explanation of the Gospel made his letters to early churches the foundation of Christian theology. Of the 27 books in the New Testament, Paul is credited as the author of 13 of them. No person, apart from Jesus Christ Himself, shaped the history of Christianity like the apostle Paul.

The Bible does not definitively state what Paul's marital status may have been. However, the social norm of the time required Pharisees and members of the Sanhedrin to be married. Since Saul was a Pharisee he was almost certainly married at one point. If this were the case, he would have been a widower at the time of his ministry. As for the rest of his family, a sister and a nephew are mentioned in Acts 23:16 but no mention is made of Paul's parents.

