

### Acts 9:1-18 (NIV)



#### Saul's Conversion

<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

<sup>5</sup> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup> "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

<sup>7</sup> The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. <sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

<sup>10</sup> In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

<sup>11</sup> The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. <sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

<sup>13</sup> "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

<sup>17</sup> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized . . . .

## Acts 9:1-18 (HCSB)

### The Damascus Road

<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest<sup>2</sup> and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

<sup>5</sup> “Who are You, Lord?” he said.

“I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting,” He replied. <sup>6</sup> “But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

<sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Then Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

### Saul's Baptism

<sup>10</sup> There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Here I am, Lord!” he said.

<sup>11</sup> “Get up and go to the street called Straight,” the Lord said to him, “to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. <sup>12</sup> In a vision<sup>[a]</sup> he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so he can regain his sight.”

<sup>13</sup> “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.”

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go! For this man is My chosen instrument to take My name to Gentiles, kings, and the Israelites. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for My name!”

<sup>17</sup> So Ananias left and entered the house. Then he placed his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>18</sup> At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.

## Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible<sup>1</sup>

### Acts 9:1-18

**9:1** The narrative returns to **Saul**, or Paul. His anger with Jesus' followers continued unabated, to the point that he was threatening to **murder** them. Paul later acknowledged his zeal in persecuting Christians ([Php 3:6](#)), and this is how he was known by others (e.g., Ananias, [Ac 9:13](#)).

**9:2** That Saul was authorized to travel to **Damascus** with warrants from the high priest to imprison people of **the Way** (a common name for early Christians; [19:9,23](#); [22:4](#)) indicates his high standing among Jewish religious leaders. He planned to bring them back to **Jerusalem** since this city was the center of Judaism.

**9:3-4** **Nearing Damascus** and no doubt thinking that his acts there would help halt the spread of Christianity, Saul instead saw **a light from heaven** that changed his life and, eventually, world history.

**9:5** It is doubtful that Saul immediately recognized the voice as that of Jesus. His use of **Lord** was probably honorific (equivalent to "sir") rather than recognition of divinity. Hence the voice said, **I am Jesus**.

**9:6** Saul was not told at this point what his mission or purpose was. That was reserved for when he encountered Ananias later in the city of Damascus. This stepwise introduction to his future kept him from being overwhelmed all at once with the changes Jesus had initiated in his life, and it also allowed the Christians in Damascus to meet and accept the one whom they feared.

**9:7** This is the first of three accounts of Saul's conversion that appear in the book of Acts ([22:6-11](#); [26:12-18](#)). Here it appears that Saul's traveling companions heard a noise but did not recognize the words that were spoken. The comments, it seems, were intended only for Saul.

**9:10** We are not told how **Ananias** came to be a Christian. A possible scenario is that he or someone he knew had been in Jerusalem at Pentecost. There they would have seen and heard wondrous signs as God sent the Holy Spirit, and possibly accepted the message preached by the apostles. The pilgrims would then have taken their newfound faith back to Damascus, establishing the church that Saul now came to persecute.

**9:13-14** Ananias's fear of Saul was such that he dared to question God's judgment. Saul's reputation as an enemy of the church was well earned, built as it was on the testimony of **many people**.

**9:15-16** God revealed His purpose for Saul to Ananias first. This ensured that Saul would have a support network in place once he learned of his new purpose in life. Otherwise, imagine Saul coming to Ananias and delivering the news. Ananias would have scoffed, assuming he let Saul close enough to speak.

**9:17-18** The ordering of events in Saul's conversion may have been altered from the standard pattern so that baptism rather than the filling of the Holy Spirit was the final event. The process may have been extended over several days rather than occurring all at once. But the result was the same: Saul became a follower of Jesus Christ.

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1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 9".

## HCSB Apologetics Study Bible<sup>2</sup>

### *Acts 9:1-18*

**9:1** Saul's murderous anger was no exaggeration. Ananias ([v. 13](#)) knew it well (see [Php 3:6](#)).

**9:2** Saul desired to bring Christians from Damascus to Jerusalem, which remained the center of Judaism. "The Way" (Jesus, [Jn 14:6](#)) was a common name for early Christians ([19:9](#), [23](#); [22:4](#); [24:22](#)).

**9:5** How did Saul know who spoke to him? Saul recognized this as Jesus' voice (the divine "Lord" [*kyrios*], rather than "sir") since: (1) the voice asked, "Why are you persecuting Me?"; (2) Saul knew he was persecuting Christians; (3) there were sensational phenomena (flashing light, Saul got knocked down); (4) Ananias, recognizing Jesus' voice, also used "Lord" ([vv. 10, 13](#)). The voice spoke in Aramaic ([26:14](#)).

**9:7** Paul's other conversion accounts ([22:6-11](#); [26:12-18](#)) revealed that his traveling companions heard something but did not recognize what was said since the comments were directed to Paul.

**9:10** Ananias was a Christian in the Damascus church (perhaps begun as a result of Pentecost or those fleeing persecution, [8:1](#)). Saul's travels to Damascus to persecute Christians indicates a known Christian community there.

**9:17-18** The ordering of events in Saul's conversion may have been altered from the standard pattern so that baptism was the final event (indicating full initiation into the Christian faith).

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2. Stanley E. Porter, "Notes on Acts," in *The Apologetics Study Bible: Understanding Why You Believe*, ed. Ted Cabal (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2007), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1636-1637.

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

### Acts 9:1-18

**9:2** Saul (later called Paul) was so zealous for his Jewish beliefs that he began a persecution campaign against anyone who believed in Christ ("followers of the Way"). Why would the Jews in Jerusalem want to persecute Christians as faraway as Damascus? There are several possibilities: (1) to seize the Christians who had fled, (2) to prevent the spread of Christianity to other major cities, (3) to keep the Christians from causing any trouble with Rome, (4) to advance Saul's career and build his reputation as a true Pharisee, zealous for the law, (5) to unify the factions of Judaism by giving them a common enemy.

**9:2-5** As Saul traveled to Damascus, pursuing Christians, he was confronted by the risen Christ and brought face to face with the truth of the Good News. Sometimes God breaks into a life in a spectacular manner, and sometimes conversion is a quiet experience. Beware of people who insist that you must have a particular type of conversion experience. The right way to come to faith in Jesus is whatever way God brings *you*.

**9:3** Damascus, a key commercial city, was located about 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem in the Roman province of Syria. Several trade routes linked Damascus to other cities throughout the Roman world. Saul may have thought that by stamping out Christianity in Damascus, he could prevent its spread to other areas.

**9:3-5** Paul refers to this experience as the start of his new life in Christ ([1 Corinthians 9:1](#); [15:8](#); [Galatians 1:15, 16](#)). At the center of this wonderful experience was Jesus Christ. Paul did not see a vision; he saw the risen Christ himself ([9:17](#)). Paul acknowledged Jesus as Lord, confessed his own sin, surrendered his life to Christ, and resolved to obey him. True conversion comes from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and leads to a new life in relationship with him.

**9:5** Saul thought he was pursuing heretics, but he was persecuting Jesus himself. Anyone who persecutes believers today is also guilty of persecuting Jesus (see [Matthew 25:40, 45](#)) because believers are the body of Christ on earth.

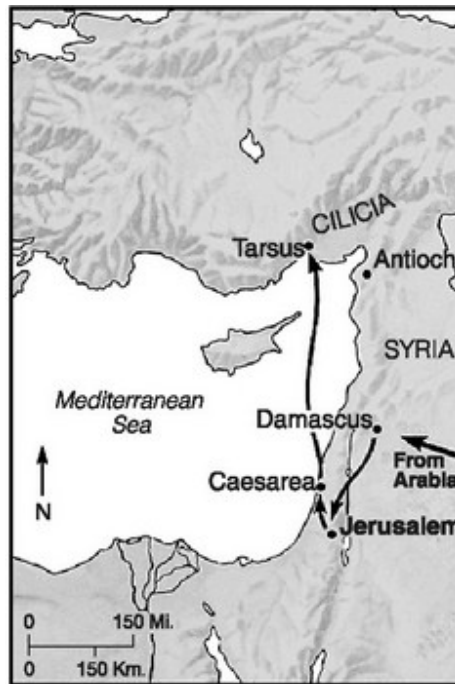
**9:13, 14** "Not him, Lord; that's impossible. He could never become a Christian!" In essence, that's what Ananias said when God told him of Saul's conversion. After all, Saul had pursued believers to their death. Despite these understandable feelings, Ananias obeyed God and ministered to Saul. We must not limit God—he can do anything. We must obey and follow God's leading, even when he leads us to difficult people and places.

**9:15, 16** Faith in Christ brings great blessings but often great suffering, too. Paul would suffer for his faith (see [2 Corinthians 11:23-27](#)). God calls us to commitment, not to comfort. He promises to be with us *through* suffering and hardship, not to spare us from them.

**9:17** Ananias found Saul, as he had been instructed, and greeted him as "Brother Saul." Ananias feared this meeting because Saul had come to Damascus to capture the believers and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem ([9:2](#)). In obedience to the Holy Spirit, however, Ananias greeted Saul lovingly. It is not always easy to love others, especially when we are afraid of them or doubt their motives. Nevertheless we must follow Jesus' command ([John 13:34](#)) and Ananias's example, showing loving acceptance to other believers.

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<sup>3</sup>Life Application Study Bible, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1834-37.



*Saul's Return to Tarsus*

At least three years elapsed between [Acts 9:22](#) and [9:26](#). After time alone in Arabia (see [Galatians 1:16-18](#)), Saul (Paul) returned to Damascus and then to Jerusalem. The apostles were reluctant to believe that this former persecutor could have become one of them. Saul escaped to Caesarea, where he caught a ship and returned to Tarsus.

[9:17, 18](#) Although Acts makes no mention of a special filling of the Holy Spirit for Saul, his changed life and subsequent accomplishments bear strong witness to the Holy Spirit's presence and power in him. Evidently, the Holy Spirit had filled Saul when he received his sight and was baptized. See the second note on [8:15-17](#) for more on the filling of the Holy Spirit.

## PAUL

No person, apart from Jesus himself, shaped the history of Christianity like the apostle Paul. Even before he was a believer, his actions were significant. His frenzied persecution of Christians following Stephen's death got the church started in obeying Christ's final command to take the gospel worldwide. Paul's personal encounter with Jesus changed his life. He never lost his fierce intensity, but from then on it was channeled for the gospel.

Paul was very religious. His training under Gamaliel was the finest available. His intentions and efforts were sincere. He was a good Pharisee who knew the Bible and sincerely believed that this Christian movement was dangerous to Judaism. Thus, Paul hated the Christian faith and persecuted Christians without mercy.

Paul got permission to travel to Damascus to capture Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem. But God stopped him in his hurried tracks on the Damascus road. Paul personally met Jesus Christ, and his life was never the same.

Until Paul's conversion, little had been done about carrying the gospel to non-Jews. Philip had preached in Samaria and to an Ethiopian man; Cornelius, a Gentile, was converted under Peter; and in Antioch of Syria, some Greeks had joined the believers. When Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to check on this

situation, he went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him to Antioch, and together they worked among the believers there. They were then sent on a missionary journey, the first of three Paul would take that would carry the gospel across the Roman Empire.

The thorny issue of whether Gentile believers had to obey Jewish laws before they could become Christians caused many problems in the early church. Paul worked hard to convince the Jews that Gentiles were acceptable to God, but he spent even more time convincing the Gentiles that they were acceptable to God. The lives Paul touched were changed and challenged by meeting Christ through him.

God did not waste any part of Paul—his background, his training, his citizenship, his mind, or even his weaknesses. Are you willing to let God do the same for you? You will never know all he can do with you until you allow him to have all that you are!

### **Strengths and accomplishments**

- Transformed by God from a persecutor of Christians to a preacher for Christ
- Preached for Christ throughout the Roman Empire on three missionary journeys
- Wrote letters to various churches, which became part of the New Testament
- Was never afraid to face an issue head-on and deal with it
- Was sensitive to God's leading and, despite his strong personality, always did as God directed
- Is often called the apostle to the Gentiles

### **Weaknesses and mistakes**

- Witnessed and approved of Stephen's stoning
- Set out to destroy Christianity by persecuting Christians

### **Lessons from his life**

- The Good News is that forgiveness and eternal life are available to all people and are gifts of God's grace through faith in Christ
- Obedience results from a relationship with God, but obedience will never create or earn that relationship
- Real freedom doesn't come until we no longer have to prove our freedom
- God does not waste our time; he will use our past and present so we may serve him with our future

### **Vital statistics**

- Where: Born in Tarsus but became a world traveler for Christ
- Occupations: Trained as a Pharisee, learned the tentmaking trade, served as a missionary
- Contemporaries: Gamaliel, Stephen, the apostles, Luke, Barnabas, Timothy

### **Key verses:**

"For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live" ([Philippians 1:21-24](#)).

Paul's story is told in [Acts 7:58-28:31](#) and throughout his New Testament letters.