



Who is the last person you would expect to change teams & trust Jesus? Today we look at one of the most important events in Christian history - the salvation of Saul of Tarsus - a real life example of a life forever changed.

The salvation of Saul of Tarsus is so important to Luke that it is mentioned on 3 different occasions in Acts (Acts 9, 22, & 26).

Saul the Persecutor

Acts 9:1-2 (NET) ¹ Meanwhile **Saul**, still breathing out threats to murder the Lord's disciples, went to the high priest ² and requested letters from him to the **synagogues in Damascus**, so that if he found any who belonged to **the Way**, either men or women, he could bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Saul was seeking to extradite **the Lord's disciples**, those who **belonged to the Way**. This is likely because the Jewish followers of Jesus recognized HIM as THE Way to eternal life, that none come to the Father except through Him (Jn. 14:6).

As the punishment for blaspheming God was death, according to the Hebrew scriptures (Lev. 24:15-16), Saul thought he was honoring God by punishing these 'blasphemers' (Acts 26:9-11).

Acts 26:9-11 (NET) ⁹ Of course, I myself was convinced that it was necessary to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus the Nazarene. ¹⁰ And that is what I did in Jerusalem: Not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons by the authority I received from the chief priests, but I also cast my vote against them when they were sentenced to death. ¹¹ I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to force them to blaspheme. Because I was so furiously enraged at them, I went to persecute them even in foreign cities.

Saul pursued followers of Jesus who fled Jerusalem all the way to **Damascus** - a 135 mile journey one-way.¹ It's as if Saul has planned to start casting his net far off and dragging it back toward Jerusalem, to bring back a full catch. Let's take a look at how far he was willing to go.



¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 316.

Change of Plans

Acts 9:3-9 (NET) ³ As he was going along, approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵ So he said, "Who are you, Lord?" He replied, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!" ⁶ But stand up and enter the city and you will be told what you must do." ⁷ (Now the men who were traveling with him stood there speechless, because they heard the voice but saw no one.) ⁸ So Saul got up from the ground, but although his eyes were open, he could see nothing. Leading him by the hand, his companions brought him into Damascus. ⁹ **For three days he could not see, and he neither ate nor drank anything.**

The persecutor was now blind, needing the help of others just to get around. God crushed Saul.

☀ **John MacArthur** *"From the ashes of Saul's old life would arise the noblest and most useful man of God the church has ever known."*²

For three days he could not see, and he neither ate nor drank anything. He is in a state of prayer (v.11) and fasting as he seeks the Lord, realizing he's been playing for the wrong team.

An Important Task for Ananias

Acts 9:10-14 (NET) ¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias," and he replied, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ Then the Lord told him, "Get up and go to the street called 'Straight,' and at Judas' house look for a man from Tarsus named Saul. For he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he may see again." ¹³ But Ananias replied, "Lord, I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to imprison all who call on your name!" ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, because this man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel." ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

Paul was a Roman citizen with a Greek education, enabling him to travel and communicate all over the empire. Yet he was also a Jew, well trained in the Scriptures under Rabbi Gamaliel. Truly, he was a **chosen instrument**, well equipped to carry the name of Jesus **to Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel**.

Saul's Salvation

Acts 9:17-19a (NET) ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house, placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he could see again. **He got up and was baptized,** ¹⁹ and after taking some food, his strength returned.

Can you imagine the moment when Saul was **baptized?** - demonstrating that it is only through the DEATH, BURIAL, & RESURRECTION of Jesus that true life can be found?

BIG TRUTH: If God can save Saul...He can save ya'll.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., Acts, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 269.

Saul, better known as Paul, writes about this later:

1 Timothy 1:15–16 (NET) ¹⁵ This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them!**¹⁶ But here is why I was treated with mercy: so that in me as the worst, Christ Jesus could demonstrate his utmost patience, as an example for those who are going to believe in him for eternal life.

If God can save Saul...He can save ya'll.

You think YOU'VE gone too far? You think someone else has gone too far?

You haven't gone too far for God's grace! If you still have breath, you still have hope.

Isn't it interesting that some of the greatest defenders of the faith are people who used to be the most intense enemies of the faith?

Saul Proves that Jesus is the Messiah

Acts 9:19b–22 (NET) For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately **he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues**, saying, “This man is the Son of God.” ²¹ All who heard him were amazed and were saying, “Is this not the man who in Jerusalem was ravaging those who call on this name, and who had come here to bring them as prisoners to the chief priests?” ²² But **Saul became more and more capable**, and was causing consternation among the Jews who lived in Damascus by **proving that Jesus is the Christ**.

There was no denying to Saul had changed teams. He was **A Life FOREVER CHANGED**.

Further, Saul was growing in knowledge & tactics & so should YOU.

* Note: At some point, Saul left Damascus (see Gal. 1:17) for Arabia (where he likely prepared more to defend his faith), after which he returned to Damascus. Most scholars see this as part of the story left out of Luke's account that would likely fit between vv. 22 & 23.

Persecutor becomes Persecutee

Acts 9:23–25 (NET) ²³ Now after some days had passed, the Jews plotted together to kill him, ²⁴ but Saul learned of their plot against him. They were also watching the city gates day and night so that they could kill him. ²⁵ But his disciples took him at night and let him down through an opening in the wall by lowering him in a basket.

According to Gal. 1:18, this trip to Jerusalem occurred 3 years after Saul's salvation (after time spent in Damascus & Arabia).

Is He For Real?

Acts 9:26–28 (NET) ²⁶ When he arrived in Jerusalem, he attempted to associate with the disciples, and **they were all afraid of him**, because they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took Saul, brought him to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he was staying with them, associating openly with them in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

Barnabas was willing to stake his life on the reality that Saul was...**A Life FOREVER CHANGED**.

What kind of crazy thing happened that caused enemies to become BROTHERS!?!?

If God can save Saul...He can save ya'll.

Like Saul, our lives can be **FOREVER CHANGED** too!

Acts 9:29-31 (NET) ²⁹ He was speaking and debating with the Greek-speaking Jews, but they were trying to kill him. ³⁰ When the brothers found out about this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. ³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experienced peace and thus was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, the church increased in numbers.

How are they experiencing peace? The primary opponent had changed teams! Paul was being targeted more than they were. The gospel message continued to go out to the planet in the power of the Spirit and ***the church increased in numbers.***

FEET2FAITH

- 🕒 **Pray for a "SAUL".** (YOU, a spouse, an enemy) - Ask God to convict of sin & save their souls.
- 🕒 **Be a Barnabas and serve a "Saul"** (even when others are afraid to).
 - 40 dozen chocolate chip cookies for inmates. (2-3" - 6 cookies per ziplock bag)
- 🕒 **Learn WHY you believe WHAT you believe and how to share with others.**
 - **Sola Scriptura** on our website & **Tactics** by Greg Koukl

Please call us if we can answer any questions or help you in any way.

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