



First Baptist Church Selmer

THE ROAD TO ROMANS • SAUL/PAUL'S PERSONAL CONVERSION • ACTS 9:1-30 •

1/4/2026

MAIN POINT

Everyone who believes the gospel is forever changed, and God uses others to help us in our new way of life.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Over time, what is something on which your views have radically changed?
(A few ideas include: political affiliations, how to raise kids, the role of the church, etc.)**

Who or what was influential in this transformation?

Has this shift in your thinking directly affected any of your relationships or changed how people view you, for better or worse? Explain.

The dictionary defines metamorphosis as a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means. Every Christian has experienced metamorphosis. We all have a story to tell because we have been powerfully changed from death to life by the gospel of Christ. There are few more radical transformations in Scripture than that of Saul on the road to Damascus. In an instant, Saul was transformed from a persecutor of the church to one of its greatest champions.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

We first hear about Saul in Acts 7 & 8 at the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, in Acts 7:60, which states, "*Saul approved of his execution.*" Armed with the authority of the high priest, Saul began to "*ravage the church...entering house after house... dragging off men and women and committing them to prison*" (8:3) in hope of stamping out the Christian movement. The Christian persecution then moved out of Jerusalem into the surrounding areas. It is not known how many Christians were in Damascus at the time, but Saul's desire to go to Damascus, some 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem, reveals the extent of his hatred for Christians (**See Appendix A**). Saul would stop at nothing to kill the spread of the gospel message.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 9:1-9.

1 "But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. 4 And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 5 And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank." (ESV)

What do Jesus' statements to Saul reveal about his close identification with His followers?

Why do you think Saul was struck blind? What might God have been trying to teach him through blindness?

How do you think Saul felt when confronted by Jesus? Given his previous activities, what might he have been thinking about during those three days of blindness and fasting (v. 9)?

Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting Him personally. Christ so identifies with His followers that to attack them is to attack Him. Jesus revealed Himself to Saul and gave him further instructions, and Saul's response was immediate. His fasting and blindness were not a punishment, but an appropriate response to the intensity of his encounter with Jesus. This encounter with Jesus resulted in a dramatic transformation in the life of this proud, Christian-hating Pharisee, as Saul would recount in his testimonies in both Acts 22

and 26. As Tony Merida in the *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* states, "Jesus humbled this arrogant and violent man, turning the terrorist into a soon-to-be evangelist."

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 9:10-19.

10 "Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' 11 And the Lord said to him, 'Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' 13 But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.' 15 But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; 19 and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus." (ESV)

How do you think Ananias must have felt when the Lord asked him to go take care of Saul?

What does Ananias' response to Jesus' directions reveal about his own life and obedience?

What plans did the Lord have for Saul? How might this have differed from Ananias' expectations?

Ananias' response of "Here I am, Lord" revealed a heart that was eager to please the Lord and obey Him. This incident shows us clearly that God's assessment of people is often radically different than our own. Where most Christians would have looked at Saul with warranted fear and trepidation, God saw a "*chosen instrument*" that He would use to carry the gospel to the known world.

Have you ever thought someone was beyond God's ability to save or use for His glory?

How does our tendency to misjudge others lead us to disobey God's commands in sharing the gospel with them?

How did Ananias address Saul? What does this reflect about the dramatic change in Saul's life?

Ananias obeyed God's command and went to Saul. God could have healed Saul without the personal interaction of another believer, but God has never intended anyone to do the Christian life alone. Ananias addressed Saul as brother, which reflects the familial relationship that exists between the family of faith.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 9:20-30.

20 "And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?' 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

* ***See note below*** *

23 When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

* ***See note below*** *

26 And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. 28 So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. 29 And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. 30 And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus." (ESV)

NOTE Now, this is where the book of Acts can get really confusing. The time period between verses 22-23 or 25-26 is not simply days, but years. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he spoke of this period between his conversion and his return to Jerusalem in Galatians 1:16b-18, "*I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas (Peter) and remained with him fifteen days.*" **(See Timeline of Paul's Life on Page 4)**

What would the crowd have expected Saul to say when he came to the synagogue? When he proceeded to preach about Christ, how did they react (v. 23)? Why do you think some of the people were upset by Saul's preaching?

Saul immediately went to the synagogue in Damascus to proclaim Jesus. The man who was once a domestic terrorist who sought to eliminate all Christians was now completely transformed by a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus.

In Acts 9:26, being mindful that it is some three years after Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, a man by the name of Barnabas is waiting in Jerusalem to provide a character reference for the transformation in Saul's life.

Why was Barnabas willing to stand up for Saul? Has anyone ever stood up for you in the way Barnabas did for Saul? In what way?

How would things have been different if Barnabas hadn't been there to stand up for Saul?

Saul's earliest ministry was characterized by bold witness, Jewish persecution, and a timid response from the rest of the church. Barnabas provides another example of discipleship. As a result of Barnabas's defense, the apostles accepted Saul into their fellowship, and they opened doors of opportunity for him to minister and spread the gospel in Jerusalem. Boldness characterized Saul's evangelism. Acts 9:31 ends the account of Saul's conversion with Saul's acceptance into the fellowship of believers. The early persecution of Christians also ended, but only for a moment. This allowed the church to experience peace, the Spirit's encouragement, and numerical growth.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Saul/Paul tells the story of his conversion several times in the book of Acts (Acts 22 & 26). What is your story? How could you share it this week with someone who has not yet believed in the gospel?

Is there anyone that you feel is irredeemable? How does Saul's story show us that God can change the hardest of hearts?

Ananias and Barnabas play an important role in discipling Saul. Who in your life could you take the time to encourage and begin to disciple?

PRAYER

Thank God for using the most unlikely people for His kingdom. Praise God for His grace in your life that transformed you into a new person living for Jesus.

COMMENTARY

ACTS 9:1-30

9:1-2 As the word of God spread and the number of disciples increased, the church met strong opposition. Saul, who had held the clothing of those who had stoned Stephen, was intent on destroying the church. This persecution was the most severe threat believers had faced to this point in the church's brief history. Saul was breathing out threats against the disciples. The verb translated breathing out also means "inhaling" or "being bent on" some activity. Saul's hostile mission was to place believers under arrest, whether men or women, and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. There they would stand trial before the Sanhedrin.

9:3-5 As Saul and those traveling with him neared the completion of their journey to Damascus, an unusual thing happened. Saul encountered the resurrected and exalted Christ. A blinding light flashed around him, and he heard a voice. The question Saul heard was succinct and accusatory. Saul was on a mission of hate to persecute Jesus' followers. The resurrected Christ, however, so identified with His people that He said the persecution was against Him personally. When Saul inquired about the identity of the One speaking to him, he used the title "Lord."

9:6-7 After securing Saul's full attention and revealing His identity as the risen Christ, Jesus commanded Saul to go into Damascus and await further instructions. 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 is the first of three accounts of Saul's conversion that appear in the Book of Acts (Acts 22:6-11; 26:12-18).

9:8-9 Saul's encounter with Jesus also impacted him physically. He was unable to see when he got up from the ground. His traveling companions had to lead him by the hand into Damascus. For three days, Saul was blind and did not eat or drink anything. Certainly, his meeting with Jesus had been a traumatic experience. His life would be changed radically by this encounter with the resurrected Christ.

9:10-12 Ananias received no special identification here other than that he was a disciple in Damascus. The Lord spoke to him in a vision and informed Ananias that he was to go to Saul and place his hands on him so that Saul's sight would be restored. As is clear from verse 17, the Lord Jesus informed Ananias that He was at work in the lives of both persons involved in the situation. The Lord had given Saul a vision of Ananias coming to him.

9:13-14 Ananias was reluctant to obey the Lord's command, for he was aware of the havoc Saul had caused among the Christian community in Jerusalem. Although Luke did not record a detailed account of Saul's activity in Jerusalem, it is obvious from reading Acts 8:1-3 that his persecution had dealt a serious blow to the Jerusalem church. Reports of the intense persecution in Jerusalem had already reached the Christian community in Damascus. The Christians in Damascus were also aware that Saul had come to their city to arrest believers. Naturally, Ananias was reluctant to place himself in what he viewed as jeopardy. He knew Saul's reputation and thus protested the Lord's call. Ananias's honest response helps to emphasize the radical transformation that had occurred in Saul's life.

9:15-16 Ananias eventually followed the Lord's command, but he did so only after the Lord assured him that He had chosen Saul. The risen Christ referred to Saul as my chosen instrument. To further encourage Ananias, the Lord briefly outlined Saul's future as a believer: he would carry the gospel to a broad cross section of the population in the Roman world of the first century. Both Gentiles and Jews would be among those to whom Saul would proclaim the message. The Lord also told Ananias that Saul himself would be called to suffer for Jesus' name. Saul, who had persecuted Christ's followers, would experience as a believer the same kind of suffering he had inflicted on others.

9:17-20 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. Saul stayed in Damascus for some days, likely becoming oriented to basic Christianity even as he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues. He gave priority to the synagogues throughout his ministry, starting there before being forced to take the message elsewhere.

9:21-22 Understandably, the initial response to Saul was skeptical amazement, but as he grew more capable, he was able to confound unbelieving Jews, proving that Jesus is the Messiah. Apparently, he was able to explain the messianic connections between the Old Testament and Jesus so clearly that the Jews in Damascus could not refute him.

9:23-25 After many days pictures Saul dutifully preached Jesus as Messiah for long enough to become the uppermost enemy of unbelieving Jews in Damascus. He had come to help their struggle against the growing Christian movement, but now he had become the chief cause of its growth. Thus, they conspired to kill him. Unable to leave via the city gates, Saul escaped in a most undignified but effective manner: he was placed in a large basket and shoved through an opening in the wall (literally “through the wall”).

9:26 Saul traveled south to Jerusalem and attempted to associate with the disciples there—the Christian community. He sought to be attached to them, to be known as one of them. Understandably, they were all afraid of him. After all, shortly before this time, he had persecuted the Jerusalem church, hunting down and imprisoning believers (see 8:3). The disciples did not believe his commitment to Christ was genuine; they thought it was a trick to enable him to capture them. They seriously doubted he was a genuine disciple.

9:27 Barnabas, “Son of Encouragement,” took a tremendous risk. He was a respected believer whom the disciples trusted. He had generously contributed to Jerusalem Christians’ needs (see 4:36-37). Barnabas took Saul to the apostles—the Twelve. Convinced Saul was a genuine believer, Barnabas was willing to act as a mediator with the apostles. The Greek text will allow the explanation in the latter part of the verse to be Barnabas’s or Saul’s words. The explanation recounted Jesus’ appearing to Saul on the road to Damascus, their conversation, and Saul’s bold preaching about Jesus in Damascus.

9:28 The apostles accepted Saul into their fellowship. That he was coming and going with the apostles indicates his full identification with them. The implication may be they opened doors of opportunity for him in Jerusalem. He was speaking boldly about Jesus in Jerusalem’s synagogues, mainly in those of the Greek-speaking Jews.

9:29 Saul conversed and debated with the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews. Saul took up Stephen’s work and likely advocated Stephen’s view that the gospel is for every person. Saul’s background as a Jew who was born and had lived in a Gentile area, Cilicia, equipped him to speak to and debate with these Jews. If Saul had debated with Stephen, that experience—coupled with his viewing the manner in which Stephen died—had a profound effect on him. The Hellenistic Jews reacted to Saul as they had responded to Stephen: they attempted to kill Saul. His claims for Christ enraged the synagogue members; they considered him to be a traitor to Judaism and sought to eliminate him.

9:30 Members of the Christian community discovered the plot to kill Saul. These believers escorted him to Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, where he boarded a ship bound

for Tarsus, his native city in Cilicia. Saul's name does not resurface in Luke's narrative until Acts 11:25, in events of about 10 years later. Saul demonstrated his intense commitment by going to Jerusalem and meeting with the disciples. In addition, he preached about Jesus and risked his life by debating some Greek Jews about Jesus.