

# Lesson 11

## From Persecutor to Believer

The Gospel had been spreading throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria since the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Now the Gospel was beginning to spread to other parts of the world. A royal official from Ethiopia had even brought the good news back to his home in Africa. But as the Gospel advanced into the world, many people persecuted the believers.

A man named Saul had witnessed Stephen's death (Acts 7) and was actively persecuting believers. His zeal for the Lord led him to search from house to house and drag the believers off to jail. All believers were in danger because of Saul's "mission" against Jesus' followers. Despite the danger, the disciples kept preaching.

But Saul's life would be forever changed when Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. Saul's mission to stop the believers from proclaiming the message of Jesus' death and resurrection would be abruptly changed. What would happen now?

### Miracles in Lydda and Joppa

As Saul's ministry was just beginning, Peter and other disciples were continuing to spread the Gospel. In Lydda, Peter met a bedridden paralytic named Aeneas (Acts 9:32-35).

1. What did Peter say to Aeneas:

*"Jesus Christ heals you; rise up and make your bed."*

All who lived in this area saw that Aeneas had been healed and turned to the Lord.

Tabitha (her Greek name was Dorcas), was a well-loved believer in Joppa who was known for her kind and loving character (v.36).

2. Number the events in the chart in the correct sequence based on verses 36-42.

Number	Tabitha's miraculous healing
3	Peter arrived at Tabitha's house, where her friends were preparing her body for burial
1	Tabitha fell sick and died
5	Peter called her friends to present Tabitha to them, now alive and well
2	Disciples in Joppa sent for Peter
4	Peter sent others out of room, knelt down and prayed, and then said, "Tabitha, arise."
6	Peter called the believers together and presented Tabitha to them, alive and well. Once again, many people believed in the Lord.

## Into the Word: Acts 9:1-43

WORD BANK		
reputation	blind	Holy Spirit
Damascus	Gentiles	Judas
persecuted	Barnabas	basket
Jesus	arrest	afraid
murderous	Tarsus	proclaim
sight	suffer	kings
	synagogues	

Fill in the blanks below using the words from the word bank.

Remember we first met Saul in Acts 7:58, 8:1-3. He was one of the leaders who (1) *persecuted* the early believers.

In Acts 9, we again meet Saul still sending (2) *murderous* threats to the Lord's disciples. In verses 1-2 he is planning a trip to (3) *Damascus* to arrest the believers and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial.

On the road, however, Saul sees a flash of light and hears a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (4) *Jesus* identifies himself as the one speaking and tells Saul to get up and continue on to Damascus.

Though Saul's companions only heard the voice, they saw the effect of what happened. Saul was now (5) *blind* and had to be led by hand into the city. He did not eat or drink for three days.

Meanwhile (vv.10-12) the Lord spoke to a believer named Ananias and told him to go to the home of (6) *Judas* on Straight Street. God told Ananias to lay hands on a man from Tarsus named Saul, to restore his (7) *sight*.

Ananias hesitates to go (vv.13-14) because he has heard of Saul's (8) *reputation* in harming the saints in Jerusalem. He also knows Saul had come with the chief priest's authority to (9) *arrest* all the believers.

God's plan for Saul (vv.15-16) was to carry His name to the (10) *Gentiles* and (11) *kings* and the people of Israel. The Lord would also show Saul how much he must (12) *suffer* for Christ.

Ananias is obedient (vv.17-19). He placed his hands on Saul, explaining that it was Jesus who sent him so that Saul may regain his sight and be filled with the (13) *Holy Spirit*.

What a sudden, amazing change in Saul! He had come to Damascus to eliminate the believers there, yet immediately after he was healed (v.20-22), he began to (14) *preach* in the (15) *synagogues* that Jesus is the Son of God. Those who heard Saul were astonished. They didn't understand. The persecutor of Christ had become a preacher of Christ.

The Jews in Damascus became so angry at Saul that they kept a constant watch on the city gates, plotting to kill him (vv.23-25). Saul learned of the plan and escaped the city in a (16) *basket* that was lowered through an opening in the city wall.

Fleeing to Jerusalem, Saul tried to join with the disciples, but they were (17) *afraid* of him because they couldn't believe he really was one of them (vv.26-28). But (18) *Barnabas* defended Saul and explained what had happened on the road to Damascus.

So Saul stayed with the apostles in Jerusalem and preached freely in the name of the Lord (vv.28-31). He debated with the Grecian Jews and they became so angry they tried to kill him. This time Saul fled to (19) *Tarsus*.

The church continued to grow, being encouraged by the Holy Spirit. The believers enjoyed a time of peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

### **New Ideas:** Persecution

Persecution involves some kind of suffering or ill-treatment because of what one believes. This could include torture, even to the point of death. It might seem unexpected for someone who has come to know Jesus, the “Prince of Peace,” to experience persecution. However, that is what Jesus predicted for those who followed after Him.

#### **For them**

Read Luke 21:12, 17. Why did Jesus tell His disciples – the men He specifically chose to carry His message – that everyone would hate them?

*On account of the name of Jesus. Since the world is opposed to the message of Jesus, it will be opposed to the messengers as well.*

However, this persecution will result in an opportunity to proclaim the message of Jesus.

#### **For us**

Fear of persecution should not prevent us from trusting in Jesus (Matthew 5:10-12). Despite persecution, Jesus promises that those who follow Him will inherit the kingdom of heaven. What promise in Romans 8:38-39 encourages you?

*Nothing can separate us from the love of God – neither death nor life, angels, rulers...anything else in all creation.*

### **Memory Verse**

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance,  
that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.  
1 Timothy 1:15

#### *Extra Memory Challenge*

*1 Timothy 1:16*

*Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.*

### **Discussion questions**

*Each teacher should encourage, as much as time permits, discussion and inquiry on the part of students. Not every aspect of the following questions is addressed here, and students may have thoughts related to but not mentioned in this guide. The obligation of the teacher, then, is to understand as deeply as possible the Scriptures that are being discussed, in order to answer as well as possible any questions a student might have.*

1. Saul was working very hard to do what he thought was best. Read Philippians 3:4-9. Years after his conversion, what did Saul (Paul) think of all the work he did? Why?

*He considered his efforts worthless because of the privilege of knowing Christ. Saul had lived his whole life carefully following the Law of God. He was enthusiastic and zealous to obey God and called himself “blameless” regarding his obedience to the Law. But after his conversion, he called all those works a loss (v.7) and rubbish (v.8). He explained that the righteousness he had worked for didn’t bring him any closer to God, but that Christ’s righteousness was enough for him to have peace with God. (Saul was his Jewish name, Paul his Greek name.)*

2. When God told Ananias to help Saul (Acts 9:10-17), he hesitated to go. But finally he obeyed God’s instruction and trusted God. How do we handle situations where doing God’s will seems difficult or even dangerous?

*We can trust in God by obeying His Word, even though we may be afraid. God promises to be with us no matter what may*

happen (Isaiah 41:10).

3. Saul left the life he had as a well-respected Pharisee and preached Christ, whom he had been persecuting. His life as a believer would be filled with suffering. He would be whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, starved, sleepless, and often in danger (II Corinthians 11:24-28). What does Paul say about suffering in your life in Romans 8:18?

*All the suffering Paul encountered in his life wasn't worth considering when he compared it to the glory he would see when he entered heaven at his death.*

## Daily Devotions

Monday: Romans 1:8-17  
Tuesday: Galatians 1:11-24  
Wednesday: Ephesians 1:1-10  
Thursday: Ephesians 6:10-17  
Friday: Philippians 1:12-26  
Saturday: Colossians 1:24-29  
Sunday: II Timothy 4:1-5

## THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSIONS, CREED, AND CATECHISM

### \* Lesson 11: Luther's Small Catechism – Teaching Law and Gospel

Scripture can be divided into two general teachings: Law and Gospel. H. U. Sverdrup's Explanation to the Catechism defines Law and Gospel:

Question #11 "What is the Law?"

"The Law is the divine Word which tells us what we must do."

Question #12 "What is the Gospel?"

"The Gospel is the good news of the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Savior."

Luther's Catechism helps us to understand the important difference between the two. That difference can be summarized with the distress signal **S.O.S.** The Law Shows **Our Sin**. The Gospel Shows **Our Savior**.

Luther's Catechism generally moves from Law (Ten Commandments) to Gospel (Creed and the Sacraments).

1. What does Romans 3:20 teach us about the Law?

*The law does not make us righteous, rather it makes us conscious of our sins.*

2. Why do you think that John 3:16 is sometimes referred to as "the Gospel in a nutshell"?

*Because it sums up God's loving plan of salvation for the world by faith in Jesus.*