

## ● Lesson 17

# FROM PERSECUTOR TO PREACHER

Saul was a devout Jew, a Pharisee well-educated in Jewish tradition and law. We know him as “Paul,” which was probably his name in the Gentile world, but “Saul” was his Hebrew name. He studied under Gamaliel, the most prominent religious scholar of his day. He was born in the city of Tarsus and was a Roman citizen, which at times offered him certain advantages. Believing that the followers of Jesus were a cult and a threat to Jewish faith, Saul hated them. With the support of the Jewish religious authorities, he devoted his life to persecuting Christians.

1. What does the Bible tell us about Saul’s **crusade** against believers?

Acts 8:1 \_\_\_\_\_

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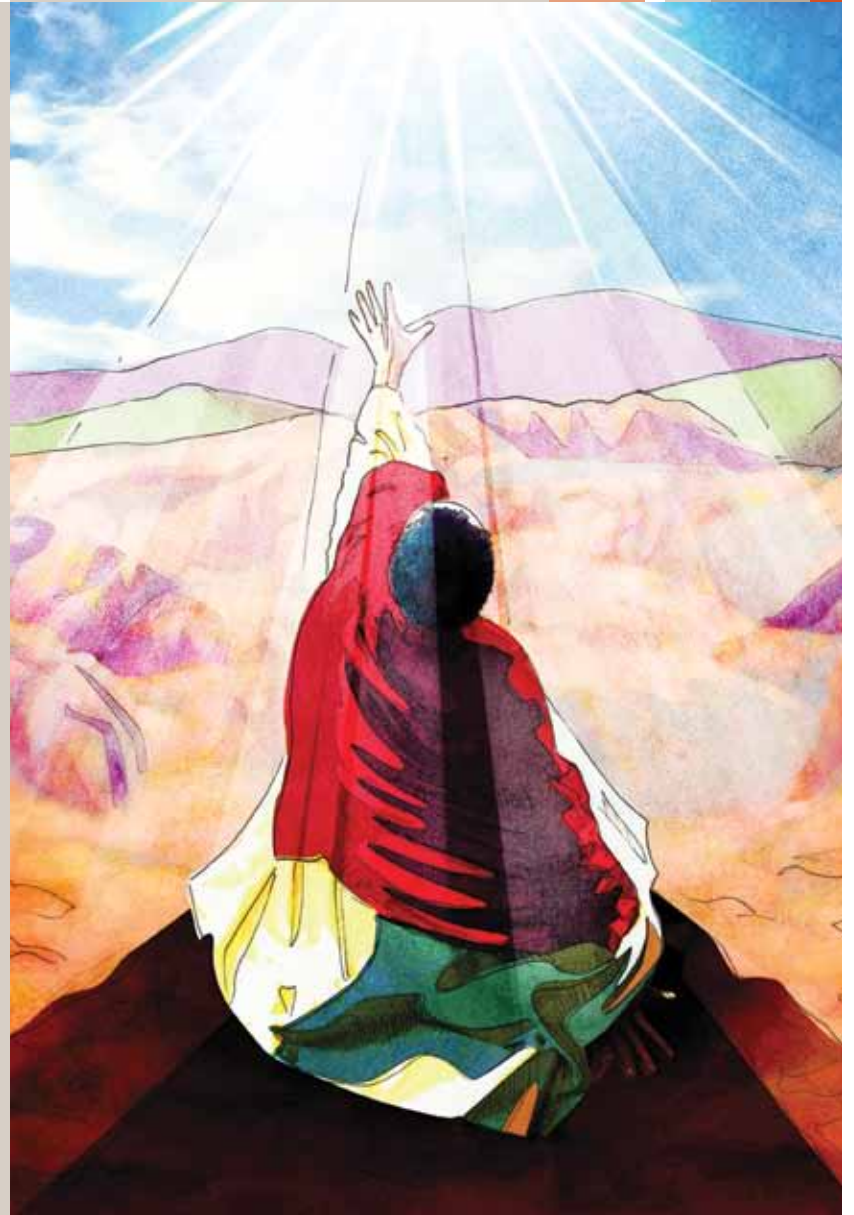
Acts 8:3 \_\_\_\_\_

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Acts 9:1 \_\_\_\_\_

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One day, Saul’s crusade against believers was dramatically interrupted. Let’s act out this amazing interruption through a drama based on Acts 9:1-20.



NARRATOR: Saul was traveling to Damascus to find Christians and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. Suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him, and he fell to the ground. Then he heard a voice!

VOICE OF JESUS: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?

SAUL: Who are you, Lord?

VOICE: I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what to do.

NARRATOR: The men traveling with Saul stood speechless! They heard the voice but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could not see anything! So they led him by the hand into Damascus. Saul was blind for three days. He didn’t eat or drink anything. But Saul was praying.

In Damascus, there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision.

## Memory Verse

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

II Corinthians 5:17

VOICE OF JESUS: Ananias!

ANANIAS: Yes, Lord.

VOICE: Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. Ask for a man named Saul, who is praying. He has seen a vision of you, Ananias, coming to him and placing hands on him to restore his sight.

ANANIAS: But Lord, I’ve heard terrible reports about this man and all the horrible things he has done to Christians in Jerusalem. Now he has come here to arrest more of us, and you want *me* to go to him?

Fast Fact: Pharisees



- An influential religious group committed to strictly observing Jewish law and to carrying out religious duties.
- Means “those who separate themselves,” yet the Pharisees were active in religion and politics during the time of Jesus.
- Added hundreds of commandments to Jewish law beyond what God had given. Some even said it was a sin to eat an egg laid on the Sabbath.
- Obeyed the outward details of the law rather than being concerned about the attitude of their hearts.
- Becoming a Pharisee involved taking an oath to strict purity, avoidance of association with the ignorant, and payment of tithes.
- Nicodemus was a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews (John 3:1), and the Apostle Paul was educated as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6).

VOICE: Yes! Go! This man is My chosen instrument to preach to the Gentiles and Jews.

NARRATOR: So Ananias went to the house and placed his hands on Saul.

ANANIAS: Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus has sent me so you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

NARRATOR: Immediately something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes.

SAUL (excitedly): I can see again! I can see again! Praise God!

NARRATOR: Saul got up and was baptized. (Ananias helps Saul.) Then he ate some food and regained his strength. After spending several days with the disciples, he went to the synagogues and began to preach.

SAUL: Jesus IS the Son of God!

The word “conversion” means “change.” We use it to describe a change from unbelief to belief in Christ. Saul’s conversion had everyone talking—Jews and Christians alike. Before, Saul had bitterly opposed Christians. But now, he faced bitter opposition from the Jews because of his conversion to Christianity.

Word Works

Saul’s life changed when he was blinded and converted on the road to Damascus. By God’s grace, he came to have true and living faith in Jesus Christ. Starting with the word “blind,” change one letter at a time to form a new word. Repeat the process until the word has been changed into “grace.” Can you complete it in nine words or less?

Blind

Grace

2. What did the Jews try to do to Saul? Acts 9:23-24

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3. How did Saul's disciples help him to escape?  
Acts 9:25

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Saul's life underwent significant changes after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. His former Jewish friends were now his most bitter enemies, and the Christians did not trust him at first. For quite some time, Saul was all alone. As far as we know, his only friend was Jesus Himself.

4. When Saul, also known as Paul, went to Jerusalem to be with the apostles and other believers, how did they react?

Acts 9:26

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5. Who befriended him? Acts 9:27

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His new friend's testimony convinced the apostles that Paul was a genuine follower of Jesus.

### PAUL'S LATER MINISTRY

Paul eventually traveled throughout the Roman world preaching Christ and the message of salvation to thousands of people. But his life was not an easy one.

Paul experienced problems of all kinds: beatings, trials, prison, shipwreck, stoning, and death threats, but his faith in Christ kept him strong through them all. No one was more influential in spreading the Gospel than Paul. Once a **notorious** enemy of Christianity, Paul became its leading missionary!

6. What does Paul say about himself in I Corinthians 15:9-10?

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7. According to Philippians 1:20-21, what was Paul's hope for his life and ministry?

That he "not be put to \_\_\_\_\_ in anything,  
but that with all boldness, \_\_\_\_\_ will even now,  
as always, be \_\_\_\_\_ in my body, whether

by life or by death. For to me, to live is \_\_\_\_\_

and to die is \_\_\_\_\_."

8. Read II Corinthians 5:17 and discuss these questions: How does this verse apply to Paul? How can it apply to me? How can it apply to those around me?

When Paul was saved by God's grace, his life was totally changed. He went from loathing Christ to loving him, from capturing Christians to communing with them, from murderous threats to missionary journeys. The man who once was a persecutor of the truth had become a preacher of it. Not everyone has a change as dramatic as Paul. But when you trust in Christ, you too are a new creation, and each day you are made more and more like Him.

## Catechism Corner

1. What is the true and living faith in Jesus Christ? (Q. 212)

*This is true and living faith:*

*That a repentant sinner lays hold of Christ as his only Savior from sin, death, and the power of Satan; and*

*That he takes refuge in Christ and His righteousness and builds thereon with the confidence of his whole heart.*

2. What benefit do we have from the true and living faith in Jesus Christ? (Q. 217)

*By faith we are justified, born anew, sanctified, and finally saved forever.*

3. How was living faith evident in the life of Paul?

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4. How will living faith in Christ be evident in your life?

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45 A.D.

48 A.D.

49 A.D.

51 A.D.

52 A.D.

55 A.D.

..... Paul's first missionary journey .....

... Paul's second missionary journey ...

... Paul's third missionary journey ...