

**2025 BIBLE STUDY SERIES
THEME: "HOPE IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULTY"**

March 26, 2025

**A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER--
"Saul and the Savior: A Transformative Encounter"**

Topics

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- Background and Context
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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

A. Consider a time when you experienced a significant change in your beliefs about Jesus. What prompted this change?

B. Briefly describe the most intimidating person you know or have known?

C. How can we draw strength from our faith to face intimidation and persecution? What practical steps can we take to respond with grace and resilience?

IMPORTANT EMPHASIS

Acts 9:1-18

The Lord has a plan for our lives. Regardless of our rough edges and even sometimes our resistance. The redemptive power of God changes us into pursuers of kingdom transformative work.

It is possible that we can tremendously underestimate the reach and the depth of God's desire and his will to transform us. God knows that there is a ripple effect when we submit to Him which attracts others, we associate with to become more aligned with our God given purpose.

In the Book of Acts Paul and Peter are two Major characters, which Luke leans this post incarnational narrative. Paul formerly known as Saul is our focal point in this study. We will study the divine arrangement that altered his life forever treading toward Damascus. So then, in what way was Saul's life altered. Through **Confrontation, Consultation and Consolation**. It is clear, if we take seriously this episodic encounter provided by Luke about this gentleman named Saul who was transformed into Paul, it will prayerfully erupt within us a desire to change for the better.

- Confrontation - **Mark 5:9**
- Consultation - **1 Samuel 30:8**
- Consolation - **Deuteronomy 31:6-8 and Hebrews 13:5-6**

Facing our Past

Facing our Past without being Fixed within its Practices. When we embrace our new found freedom and future in God, we become more open to the unidentified areas of our lives that barricades are residing. But through the shaping and molding of the Holy Spirit these **barriers** are miraculously transformed into **blessings** for others who have seen our journey or who have heard about our journey so that they can ultimately be impacted by our journey.

Encounter with Jesus (the Lord) Acts 9:3-5

Grounded- What areas in our lives do we need grounding. Is arrogance an issue! **1 Peter 5:6**
Guilt- We participate in practices that poison our own potential **Romans 3:23** and **Romans 6:23**
Guidance- Who will take the time to engage in loving confrontation to turn our lives around.
Philippians 2:12

Blinded Eyes and a Believers Enthusiasm Acts 9:7-8

Voluntarily Fasting- When there is a need for an ultimate change there must be unusual sacrifice. **Matthew 6:17-18**
Visitor disgorged his Feelings- Ananias must remove the cookies (history) of his perception of Saul.
Virtuous Fundamentals- When God is changing you what people should find you promoting is prayer. **1 Thessalonians 5:17**

Instrument in the hands of God Acts 9: 15

(He)Owns us despite our Mistakes- Jesus says Saul will be his tool or instrument. This means he is called to be used not to be untouched behind the show glass of ministry.

Out front in the Ministry- Paul is going to be put out front not by himself but put out front by God! **James 4:10**

Occupying the seat of Misery- Suffering is a part of ministry. **Matthew 24:7-9**

Official in his Movements – Paul is an assigned apostle by Jesus

- **Blindness was Lifted**
- **Baptized in the Lord Jesus**
- **Broke the Fast before Leaving**

KEY TERMS

Ananias
Authority
Barnabas
Blindness
Change
Christianity
Church
Damascus
Disciples
Divine Intervention
Fasting
Galilee
Gentiles
Holy Spirit

Jerusalem
Jesus Christ
Jews
Judea
Light
Obedience
Paul
Peace
Persecution
Persevering
Power
Prayer
Redemption

Restoration
Salvation
Samaria
Saul
Sight
Speechless
Synagogues
Tarsus
The Way
The Truth
Visions
Witnessing
Zealous

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE

ACTS 9:1-31 NASB 1995

¹Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,

² and asked for letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them in shackles to Jerusalem.

³ Now as he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;

⁴ and he fell to the ground and 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 get up and enter the city, and it will be told to you what you must do.”

⁷ The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.

⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

¹¹ And the Lord *said* to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas 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 lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight."

¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints in Jerusalem;

¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer in behalf of My name."

¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

¹⁸ And immediately *something* like fish scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

¹⁹ and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were in Damascus,

²⁰ and immediately he *began* to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

²¹ All those hearing *him* continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not the one who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"

²² But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

²³ When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him,

²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were also closely watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;

²⁵ but his disciples took him at night and let him down through *an opening in* the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried *repeatedly* to associate with the disciples; and *yet* they were all afraid of him, as they did not believe that he was a disciple.

²⁷ But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus.

²⁸ And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

²⁹ And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic *Jews*; but they were attempting to put him to death.

³⁰ Now when the brothers learned *of it*, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

³¹ So the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed peace, as it was being built up; and as it continued in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it kept increasing.

OUTLINE

- I. Saul Zealously Pursued People of the Way (9:1-2)**
 - A. Saul Suppressed the People of the Way
 - B. Saul Subdued the People of the Way
 - C. Saul Seized the People of the Way
- II. Saul Abruptly Lost Sight of the Way (9:3-19)**
 - A. Saul's Sudden Sightlessness
 - B. Ananias's Assignment
 - C. Saul's Spiritual Shift
- III. Saul Zealously Preached the Way (9:20-31)**
 - A. Saul's Purpose—Proclaiming the Way
 - B. Preaching and Peril in the Way
 - C. Protection, Peace, and Progression of the Way

INTRODUCTION

In a past lesson, we learned about persevering in a transformed life to achieve eternal life with Jesus Christ. Several biblical figures experienced transformation through encounters with Jesus: Moses became a leader, Zacchaeus a repentant follower, the Woman at the well an evangelist, and Saul/Paul a preacher and apostle. In today's lesson, we will examine Saul's seismic and transformative encounter with Jesus.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Acts 9:1-31 describes the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a fervent persecutor of Christians, into Paul the Apostle, a pivotal figure in early Christianity. Saul, known for his zealous efforts to *suppress* the Christian movement, was traveling to Damascus to arrest followers of "the Way." On the road, he experienced a divine encounter with Jesus, who appeared in a blinding light, asking, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" This event left Saul temporarily *blind*. In Damascus, a disciple named Ananias, instructed by the Lord, visited Saul, restored his sight, and baptized him. Saul began *preaching* about Jesus, astonishing many who knew of his past. His *transformation* led to initial skepticism among believers, but Barnabas vouched for him, facilitating his acceptance. Saul's bold preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem stirred opposition, prompting believers to help him escape to Tarsus. This passage highlights themes of redemption, divine intervention, and the spread of Christianity despite persecution.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

- I. Saul Zealously Pursued People of the Way (9:1-2)**
 - A. Saul Suppressed the People of the Way
 - B. Saul Subdued the People of the Way
 - C. Saul Seized the People of the Way

¹Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, ²and asked for letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them in shackles to Jerusalem.

Acts 9:1-2 highlights Saul's intent to *suppress* [smother, squash, or destroy] the early Christian movement, which he viewed as a threat to traditional Jewish beliefs and practices. He seeks authorization from the high priest to arrest followers of "the Way" in Damascus, aiming to bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Saul Suppressed the People of the Way

Saul (later called Paul, the equivalent of "Saul" in Greek), first mentioned as a participant in the stoning of Stephen (see 7:58; 8:1), was so *zealous* [passionate, fervent, intense] about his Jewish beliefs that he began a *persecution* campaign against all who believed in Christ, all who were _____ **of the Way**. This name implied "the way of the Lord" or "the way of salvation." Saul was a member of the Pharisaic sect (**Phil 3:5; Acts 23:6; 26:5**) and devoted to upholding "the traditions of the forefathers" (**Gal 1:13-14**).¹ His aim was to *suppress* this movement considering it to be *heretical* [blasphemous, unorthodox] in relation to Judaism.

Saul Subdued the People of the Way

According to the King James Version Dictionary, the word "*subdue*" means to conquer by force or the exertion of superior power and bring into permanent subjection. Saul sought to subdue and overpower the People of "the Way" by intimidation and with threatening language.

Saul Seized the People of the Way

The Jews in Jerusalem wanted to persecute Christians in Damascus to: (1) capture those who fled, (2) stop Christianity's spread to major cities, and (3) prevent trouble with Rome. Saul sought letters from the high priest to authorize the capture and extradition of Christians, with synagogues in Syria likely recognizing this right of extradition. Saul intended to seize and arrest both men and women and bring them back in chains.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. How does Saul's zeal for his Jewish beliefs influence his actions against the early Christians?

2. What does the term "the Way" mean in the context of early Christianity?

¹ Betz, Hans Dieter. 1992. ["Paul \(Person\)."](#) In *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 5:193. New York: Doubleday.

3. How did Saul go about capturing the People of the Way? (9:2)

EXPLORING THE TEXT

II. Saul Abruptly Lost Sight of the Way (Acts 9:3-19)

- A. Saul's Sudden Sightlessness
- B. Ananias's Assignment
- C. Saul's Spiritual Shift

3 Now as he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and 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 get up and enter the city, and it will be told to you what you must do.” 7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. 9 And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas 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 lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.” 13 But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your name.” 15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer in behalf of My name.” 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 And immediately something like fish scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; 19 and he took food and was strengthened.

Acts 9:3-19 describes **Saul's transformative encounter with Jesus** on the road to Damascus. As Saul travels, a heavenly light suddenly surrounds him, and he hears Jesus' voice asking why Saul persecutes Him. Saul, struck blind, is led to Damascus, where he neither eats nor drinks for three days. Meanwhile, the Lord instructs a disciple named Ananias to visit Saul. Despite his initial fear due to Saul's reputation, Ananias obeys, lays hands on Saul, and restores his sight. Saul is then filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized, marking the beginning of his new mission to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.

Saul's Sudden Sightlessness

As Saul traveled to Damascus, a sudden heavenly light surrounded him, causing him to fall to the ground. He heard Jesus' voice asking why Saul was persecuting Him. Struck blind, Saul was led by his companions into Damascus, where he remained sightless for three days, neither eating nor drinking.

Comparison of Saul's Physical and Spiritual Blindness in Acts 9:3-9

Saul's physical blindness is a direct result of his encounter with the divine light from heaven. This sudden loss of sight symbolizes Saul's spiritual blindness, representing his inability to see the _____ about Jesus and his persecution of Christians. Physically, Saul is rendered helpless, needing to be led by hand into Damascus, which mirrors his spiritual state of being lost and misguided in his zeal against the followers of "the Way." This period of blindness, lasting three days, serves as a time of reflection and _____, leading to his eventual _____ **awakening** and acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. The restoration of his physical sight by Ananias parallels the opening of his spiritual eyes, marking the beginning of his new mission to spread the gospel.

Ananias's Assignment

In Acts 9:10-19, Ananias' assignment was to visit Saul in Damascus. The Lord instructed Ananias in a **vision** to go to the street called Straight and inquire at the house of Judas for Saul of Tarsus, who was _____. Ananias was to lay his hands on Saul to restore his sight. Despite his initial hesitation due to Saul's reputation, Ananias obeyed, went to Saul, and after laying his hands on him, Saul regained his sight, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and was baptized.

Ananias's reaction and _____ to the Lord offer several lessons:

Faith and Trust: Ananias trusted God's plan despite his initial fear and hesitation about Saul's reputation.

Obedience: He followed God's instructions, demonstrating the importance of obedience even when tasks seem daunting.

Compassion and Forgiveness: Ananias showed compassion by addressing Saul as "Brother Saul," highlighting the power of _____ and acceptance.

Role in God's Plan: His actions remind us that everyone has a role in God's plan, no matter how small it may seem. **Praying:** Ananias's willingness to listen and respond to God's call underscores the importance of prayerful communication with God.

Saul's Spiritual Shift

After Saul's transformative encounter on the road to Damascus, he realized Jesus was alive, the Son of God, and the Messiah. This change amazed those who expected him to arrest Jesus' followers. Instead, Saul preached the Christian message, surprising many. His preaching was powerful, using Old Testament prophecies and facts from Jesus' life to prove Jesus was the Messiah.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

4. Describe the events that occurred when Saul was on the road to Damascus. (9:3-6)

5. How did Saul's physical blindness reflect his spiritual state before encountering Jesus? (9:3-9)

6. Was Saul's blindness temporary or permanent? Briefly explain. (9:8, 9, 12, 17, 18)

EXPLORING THE TEXT**III. Saul Zealously Preached the Way (9:20-31)**

- A. Saul's Purpose—Proclaiming the Way
- B. Preaching and Peril in the Way
- C. Protection, Peace, and Progression of the Way

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were in Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹ All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not the one who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" ²² But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ. ²³ When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were also closely watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; ²⁵ but his disciples took him at night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket. ²⁶ When he came to Jerusalem, he tried repeatedly to associate with the disciples; and yet they were all afraid of him, as they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how he

had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus. ²⁸ And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. ³⁰ Now when the brothers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus. ³¹ So the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed peace, as it was being built up; and as it continued in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it kept increasing.

After Saul's conversion, he immediately began proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues of Damascus, astonishing those who knew of his past _____ of Christians. As Saul grew stronger in his faith, he confounded the Jews by proving Jesus is the Christ. However, a plot to kill him emerged, prompting his disciples to help him escape by lowering him in a basket through the city wall. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, the disciples were initially afraid of him, but _____ vouched for Saul, explaining his encounter with Jesus and his bold preaching. Saul then moved freely in Jerusalem, speaking _____ in the name of the Lord. Despite attempts on his life by Hellenistic Jews, the brothers sent him to Tarsus for safety. Meanwhile, the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed peace, was strengthened, and continued to grow in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Saul's Purpose—Proclaiming the Way

After Saul's conversion, he immediately began proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues of Damascus. This astonished those who knew of his past persecution of Christians. As Saul grew stronger in his faith, he confounded [confused, baffled, or mystified] the Jews by proving that Jesus is the Christ, demonstrating a significant **transformation** and **commitment** to his new mission.

Preaching and Peril in the Way

In Acts 9:23-29, Saul's bold preaching about Jesus in Damascus and Jerusalem led to significant peril. After many days of proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God, the Jews in Damascus plotted to kill him. Saul became aware of their plot, and his disciples helped him escape by lowering him in a basket through an opening in the city wall. When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he faced skepticism from the disciples who were afraid of him due to his past persecution of Christians. However, **Barnabas** vouched for Saul, explaining his encounter with Jesus and his bold preaching in Damascus.

Barnabas, originally named Joseph, was a Levite from Cyprus. He was known for his generosity and encouragement, earning the nickname "**Son of Encouragement**". Barnabas played a pivotal role in the early Christian church, particularly in supporting and advocating for Saul (later known as Paul) after his conversion.

Barnabas vouched for Saul to the apostles in Jerusalem, explaining Saul's encounter with Jesus and his bold preaching in Damascus. Barnabas and Saul later undertook missionary journeys together, spreading the gospel and defending Gentile converts against the Judaizers. Barnabas was also instrumental in nurturing the emerging church and championing the inclusion of Gentiles. His contributions extended beyond financial support to leadership and reconciliation within the early Christian community.

Protection, Peace, and Progression of the Way

After Barnabas' advocacy for Saul, he was then able to move freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews, who also attempted to kill him. The brothers in Jerusalem learned of the plot and sent Saul to Tarsus for his safety.

Acts 9:31 highlights a period of peace and growth for the early Christian church. After Saul's conversion and subsequent departure to Tarsus, the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. This peace allowed the church to be built up and strengthened. The believers continued to live in the fear of the Lord and were comforted by the Holy Spirit. As a result, the church kept increasing in numbers.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

7. What was Saul's immediate action after his conversion, and how did it surprise those who knew his past? (9:19b & 9:20)

8. How did Saul's preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem demonstrate his transformation and commitment to his new mission? (9:21-22)

9. What role did Barnabas play in Saul's acceptance among the apostles in Jerusalem? (9:27)

10. What does Acts 9:31 reveal about the state of the early church after Saul's departure to Tarsus?

LIFE APPLICATION

Think about it—

- Consider the role of Ananias in Saul's transformation. How can you be an Ananias in someone else's life, offering support and encouragement during their journey of change?
- Saul's encounter with Jesus led to a complete transformation. How can you remain open to transformative experiences in your own spiritual journey?

RESOURCES

Adult Questions for LESSONMaker, LOGOS Bible Software

The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary

Baker's Bible Dictionary

Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

Life Application New Testament Commentary