

# Acts

## Part 24 – “God Saves a Terrorist”

### Acts 9:1-19a

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is one of the great watershed moments in church history. Along with the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost and the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius, Saul's conversion is highlighted by Luke as one of the key turning points in God's redemptive purposes. The divine irony of a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin becoming the apostle to the Gentiles is not to be missed. Paul's biography was governed by the sovereign grace of God. This murderous persecutor of the church would go on to be the church's greatest missionary and composer of most of the books of the New Testament.

### Exegetical Outline:

- I. The mission to the Gentiles begins (8:4-12:25)
  - A. Philip's mission to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian official (8:4-40)
  - B. The conversion of Paul and the launch of his missionary work (9:1-30)**
    - 1. Saul's conversion (9:1-19a)**
    2. Paul's mission in Damascus and in Jerusalem (9:19b-30)
  - C. The mission of Peter in Palestine (9:31-11:18)
  - D. The mission in Antioch (11:19-30)

**Main Idea:** There are no sinners so bad that God cannot save them by His powerful grace.

### 1. Jesus Confronts Saul. (vv. 1-5)

- Luke's description of the physical phenomena (blinding light and a voice from Heaven) are meant to be understood as objective realities. This is not a private subjective experience by Saul. It was a public event observable by all those present. This is significant not least of all because there will be those during Paul's ministry who will seek to deny his status as an apostle.
- Saul addresses the One speaking to him as “Lord.” He does not yet know it is Jesus speaking to him but given the phenomena, Saul understands that this is some sort of a divine messenger.
- Jesus identifies himself as the one whom Paul is persecuting. To persecute the church is to persecute Jesus. In this way Jesus points out His solidarity with His people.
- Later union with Christ would become a prominent feature of Paul's theology (“in Christ”).
- Paul's religious zeal actually put him at odds with the God whose honor he believed he was defending.



**2. Jesus Converts Saul. (vv. 1-19a)**

- Formally understood, Christian conversion involves both repentance from sin and faith in Jesus. Luke does not describe for us the exact moment of Saul's conversion. Rather the entire episode represents the massive upheaval that conversion caused in Saul's life.
- Conversion involves a change both in what we believe and in how we live. A change in what we believe without any change in how we live is nothing more than dead orthodoxy ("Even the demons believe and tremble"). A change in how we live without any change in what we believe is dead moralism ("If Christ is not raised then we are to be pitied above all men").
- In Saul's case conversion meant a total repudiation of what he had believed about Jesus and an embrace of Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord. His conversion also resulted in a radical change in how he lived. He changed from being the church's chief persecutor to being the church's chief missionary.

**3. Jesus Commissions Paul. (vv. 15-16)**

- Jesus changed Paul's vocation from Pharisee to Christian missionary.
- The objection raised by Ananias is completely understandable. How can this man who had been leading the violent persecution against the church now be trusted? But God's commission is never withdrawn in response to human objection or confusion.
- The Lord tells Ananias that Paul "is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (vs. 15).
- Paul is now Jesus' "chosen instrument." The word translated "instrument" denotes a person or thing "exercising a particular function." Paul, the persecutor of Jesus will now be Paul the chosen instrument of Jesus.

**4. Jesus Comforts Paul. (vv. 17-19)**

- Ananias becomes the Lord's chief means to comfort Paul in the days immediately following his conversion.
- Imagine what it must have meant to Paul to hear this faithful disciple of Jesus call him "brother Paul." He is then baptized, presumably Ananias. Certainly Paul would have been baptized according to Jesus instructions, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Thus Paul was formally welcomed into the church having received the sign of the new covenant.

**God's Great Object Lesson...**

*I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

(1 Timothy 1:12-17)