

LIVING HOPE  
STUDY GUIDE:  
BOOK OF ACTS

Acts 9:1-31, 22:1-29

# Saul of Tarsus:

AMBASSADOR OF JESUS CHRIST  
TO THE GENTILES

## I: WHO WAS SAUL OF TARSUS

There are several accounts of Saul's conversion in the book of Acts. Luke tells the story in chapter 9. Saul, with the new name of Paul, retells it himself in Jerusalem before a large crowd, (Chapter 22) and again in chains, before the governor, Festus and king Herod Agrippa and his daughter, Bernice (Chapter 26). Each account gives us slightly different details. This third account coincides with Paul's request to be tried by Caesar in Rome.

It is interesting to note that long before God called Saul to be His ambassador to the gentiles, God was preparing him for a challenging life of ministry. Saul was a Roman citizen, which gave him special privileges. He was also a well-educated Pharisee, knowledgeable in Old Testament studies and the Jewish laws and culture. God prepared his heart for recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, prophesied so many times in the prophets of the Old Testament.

As the movement into Christianity among the Jews grew, so did the resistance against recognizing Jesus as the one they had been waiting for, especially among the leadership of Jews and of the temple. Saul was one of them and he became a fanatic against the followers of Jesus Christ.

## II: SAUL MEETS JESUS

READ ACTS 9:1-31

As a result Saul of Tarsus became a vicious man, intent on annihilating what was a growing movement of followers of Jesus Christ. He thought he was doing the religious leaders a favor. He went as far as to obtain a legal document from the high priest giving him permission to track down Christian Jews in Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and execution.

And then ..... he met Jesus.

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? (9: 4)

When Jesus identified Himself, Saul, blind and helpless, was led by others to Damascus to wait for God's plan for his life. Also in Damascus, another disciple by the name of Ananias, received a vision from God. His orders were to go to a specific place to bless a specific man "who was praying." How did Saul go from being a persecutor of Christians to a missionary like no other? Ananias was hesitant. He knew Saul's reputation, but God said. "Go". And Ananias went. Notice the plan God had for Saul.

“This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their Kings, and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (9: 15, 16)

Ananias greeted him with the term “Brother”, proclaimed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and watched as the Holy Spirit claimed Saul’s life. Saul had gone from an executioner of Christians to a powerful ambassador of Jesus Christ to those who had never heard the gospel. His task was to reach out to those who would become “the great multitude” in Revelations 7:9.

### III: THE CHURCH AND SAUL

As Saul moved into his calling as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, the Christians demonstrated a deep suspicion of him. How were they to accept as a brother in Christ someone who had spearheaded a deadly persecution of his followers? The Jews conspired to kill him, viewing him as a deadly imposter. Saul escaped from Damascus and travelled to Jerusalem and there he met Barnabas, a man of God and a leader in the young church. Barnabas was a man who believed in second chances and became Saul’s advocate. In Jerusalem Saul’s conversion story decreased the fear the Jews had of his motives and Saul became an ardent evangelist. In his journey, he was persecuted, flogged, stoned, imprisoned and lived a life of complete submission to Jesus Christ.

God’s grace reached out to Saul, and he became a vessel in God’s hands. He stood, broken and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Sometimes people do not only need God’s grace, but also the grace of the Church. We are to forgive one another and accept the fact that God’s grace is sufficient to cover all sins, even those of fellow believers. We are called to live grace filled lives, reflecting God’s grace for us. Saul experienced that in the Church at Jerusalem.

### IV: THE CHURCH GROWS

The church of Jesus Christ was going through a major change. Paul’s outreach was to be “to every nation, tribe, people and language”. (Rev. 7: 9) The Christian Jews were called to make a major shift in their understanding. They had waited long for the Messiah and had always been convinced that He would come to set His people free from Romans. Never had they considered that Jesus had come for those they considered unclean – the Gentiles. God is a God of “progressive revelation” and continues to teach His Church what He is doing. Saul listened and became an ardent, passionate, committed witness to the gospel, all the way to Rome.

**1. Think through the miracle of Saul’s conversion. Do you have someone in your life, who seems so resistant to the gospel, you feel despair sometimes? Remember Saul and keep praying.**

**2. How can we help each other discern what God is calling us to be and do? Are we listening?**

**3. What are your God given gifts which He is asking you to use for His glory right where you are?**

**4. Is there someone in the church to whom you need to extend grace?**

**5. What do you think the church looks like to our community? Are our lives dramatically different from those who do not know Jesus? Should they be? Why or why not?**

**6. What holds you back from witnessing for Jesus Christ?**

**7. What is God teaching us in the story of Saul's conversion?**