

# **ANTIOCH BIBLE CLASS**

## **LESSON SUBJECT**

# **THE CONVERSION OF PAUL**

## **SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 9:1-31**

**MEMORY VERSE. ACTS 9:15-16.** But the Lord said unto him, go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Thus far in the book of Acts, the progress of the church has been marked by continual and miraculous manifestations of the power of God on its behalf. The church could not survive, then or now, without the Lord working with them. In the lesson before us we come to a watershed moment when the power of God was never more manifest than in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, to the apostle Paul. His conversion begins an unparalleled time in the growth and spread of the gospel to the Roman world. Since it would be impossible to adequately cover his life's work for the Lord in one lesson, we will basically confine this lesson to his miraculous conversion

Saul was born in Tarsus, with distinct credentials as a Roman citizen which afforded him valuable benefits. He was a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin, subscribing to the strict religious traditions of the Pharisees. He was "brought up" at the feet of Gamaliel, who was also a Pharisee, a doctor of the law and a member of the Jewish council. Paul was an extremely zealous man, especially as it pertained to the practice of his religious convictions. How long Paul had been in the area of Jerusalem is uncertain. It is entirely possible that he was there during some of the ministry and sacrifice of Christ. His first appearance in scripture is at the time of the stoning of Stephen, where he held the raiment of those doing the stoning.

Because of his deep religious devotion to the ways of the law, he was violently opposed to this "new religion", primarily because it was promoted among the Hebrew people. He obtained letters from the priests, authorizing him to go to Damascus and arrest any he might find of "that way". This is where our lesson finds him. On this journey, the course of his life and the history of the church were dramatically changed. Paul experiences a mighty, life-changing encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road that reversed all of his plans against the Christian church and made him its most ardent supporter. That is the story of this lesson.

## **DAILY SCRIPTURE READINGS AND THOUGHTS**

**MONDAY. – ACTS 9:1-2. SAUL THE PERSECUTOR.**

**SCRIPTURE.**

V1. And Saul, yet breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 2. And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

#### COMMENTS.

Saul seems bent on the total destruction of the Christian Church. In chapter 8:3, after the stoning of Stephen, he “made havoc of the disciples”. He even went from house to house, finding professors of faith in Christ, and put them in prison. The ninth chapter begins with Paul breathing out threats and slaughter against the church. Damascus is some 130 miles from Jerusalem. Apparently right in the synagogues in that area, there must have been those who were favorable to the message of Christ. We don’t have any record as to how the gospel reached that city. Maybe Jews visiting on some feast day, or maybe they were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Damascus is not all that far from Paul’s home town of Tarsus, at least it could have been on one of the trade routes.

Paul obtains letters of authority from the high priest to go to the synagogues of that city and bind all believers and bring them to prison in Jerusalem. He was so intent on destroying this “sect” which was advancing everywhere. Later in his life he described his vicious behavior as being blasphemous and murderous, which he surely regretted until his dying day.

#### TUESDAY. ACTS 9:3-9. THE PERSECUTOR MEETS JESUS ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD.

#### SCRIPTURE.

V3. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me? 5. And he said, who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. 6. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. 7. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. 8. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. 9. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

#### COMMENTS.

This rendezvous with the redeemer has made the “Damascus Road” synonymous with the defeat of sin in many lives. You cannot help but ask the question as to exactly what it was that made this particular moment occur just as it did. Had God been dealing with Saul’s heart? In his constant persecution of Christians was their faith and example eroding the foundation of his motives? Paul knew the Old Testament well. He just didn’t understand its application and revelation of Jesus. Maybe all that he was seeing, plus the convicting power of the Holy Spirit was breaking down the walls built in his life against Christ. It is for certain that powerful conviction is at work; no one is converted without it. Another factor surely was the prayers of God’s people, that they might be

delivered from his persecution and that he might be delivered from his religious bondage. With all of this, the light and voice from heaven smote him to the ground. There in that awesome moment, his heart was changed from persecutor to pleading for help. The rest, as we say, is history.

**WEDNESDAY. ACTS 9:10-19. A CHOSEN VESSEL FOR A VERY GREAT WORK OF GOD.**

**SCRIPTURE.**

V10. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias: and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, behold, I am here Lord. 11. And the Lord said unto him, arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for behold, he prayeth. 12. And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. 13. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to the saints at Jerusalem. 14. And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. 15. But the Lord said unto him, go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: 16. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. 17. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightiest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy ghost. 18. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. 19. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

**COMMENTS.**

The fight is gone; the heart has been humbled, and the life that just hours before was full of hostility and rage against Christ and his church, is now on his knees before this Christ, seeking entrance into that church.

God worked with Paul and with Ananias, who was understandably skeptical of going to meet Paul, given his reputation, and also seeing that he knew of his purpose for coming to Damascus, in an effort to finish Paul's salvation. But Ananias obeyed the Lord, and was used as an instrument in Paul's healing, baptism and of his being filled with the Holy Ghost. This is the record of one of the most notable and most powerful conversions in the New Testament. God said to Ananias that Paul was a chosen vessel to bear his name to the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Saul the persecutor has become Paul the apostle.

**THURSDAY. ACTS 9:20-25. STRAIGHT WAY HE PREACHED CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUE.**

**SCRIPTURE.**

V20. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. 21. But all that heard him were amazed, and said, is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

22. But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. 23. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him. 24. But their laying await was known of Saul, and they watched the gates day and night to kill him. 25. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

#### COMMENTS.

Not only has Paul's heart and life been changed, but so has his theology. In fact that was the basis of his life being changed. He had come face to face with the "theology" of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ so often and so powerful, it had changed his heart. Much like Martin Luther was in the blinding flash and reality that the "just shall live by faith", and was converted from the religious bondage of Romanism, so also Paul is transformed from the law to grace by the revelation of truth he could no longer deny. And straight way he preached Christ in the synagogue, confounding the Jews and proving that Jesus is the Christ. You may ask how did he immediately "preach Christ" with no seminary training nor any other preparation for ministry. The difference was the enabling power of the Holy Ghost that not much reliance is placed on by today's would-be ministers. Paul had a good knowledge of Old Testament scriptures, just not a good understanding of their meaning. The Holy Spirit immediately took the word of the Lord, so fragmented and traditionalized in his mind, and made sense of it to his heart. The only real instructor of sacred scripture is the Holy Spirit. When Paul started preaching a risen Lord and a Christian's resurrection only through Christ, his enemies laid plans to kill him. Thus did his ministry begin, and, many years later, thus did it likewise end.

#### FRIDAY. ACTS 9:26-31. OVERCOMING A SINFUL REPUTATION.

#### SCRIPTURE.

V26. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. 27. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. 29. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. 30. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. 31. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

#### COMMENTS.

Paul escapes from the plot to kill him in Damascus and goes to Jerusalem where he had previously desired letters of authority from the high priest to persecute disciples of "that way". Now he himself is a supporter of "that way", and is the object of plots to kill him. Professing faith in Christ was serious business back then, and also now. In Paul's case he was like a lightning rod, drawing trouble to him.

In Jerusalem he sought to join himself to the disciples but they were afraid of him and with good reason. After all, the last time he was in Jerusalem he was bent on their destruction. He had given his life to a cause that had earned him a bad reputation among Christians. Now that he was a changed man, he would have to work equally hard to build a good reputation. When you profess faith in Christ, the church has a right to expect you to prove your genuine dedication to the Lord, while the church has an obligation to be patient and understanding with you. Like everyone else, he needed help in the process of developing the confidence of church leaders.

In Damascus, Ananias was in the right place to help him; when he came to Jerusalem, Barnabas was a life saver for him by recommending him to the apostles. All through history there have been great men with lesser known support behind them, opening doors for them. Paul finds fellowship within the church but a mob of murderers without. "The brethren" helped him escape this plot to kill him and brought him to Cesarea. From there he returned to his hometown of Tarsus. And the churches had rest throughout Judea and all Galilee and Samaria.

#### SUMMARY.

We would all agree that it was truly a great day for the church and the gospel when Paul was converted. But to keep things in perspective, we should also agree that it is a great day for the church and the gospel when anyone is converted. The conversion of every person takes the same power, grace and inward experience as Paul had. The difference comes in the way the life is lived and used of God after conversion. God may have different plans for the use of our lives but only one plan for our conversion. The conversion of Paul is dramatized for us by what he was before and the change he experienced and what he became afterwards in the hands of God.

When he later wrote a letter to the church at Philipi, recalling all of the "advantages" of his previous life, he counted them but dung that he might win Christ. Now that he is converted, many of those advantages can be used in the work of the ministry. He was a Roman citizen, and this was often a great advantage to him. Being taught at the feet of Gamaliel could now serve him in the gospel. His determined, persevering and enduring temperament was harnessed for the tremendous work before him. Now that he is converted from sin, filled with the Holy Ghost, and the Lord Jesus is revealed unto him, and also has a "thorn in the flesh" reminding him of his own infirmities, he is equipped as few men have ever been to serve the Lord and, perhaps, as few men ever have served him.

#### QUESTIONS.

1. What would you think is the importance and reason for desiring letters from the high priest to go to Damascus and arraign Christians and bring them to Jerusalem?
2. Discuss why you think Paul had his rendezvous with God before he got to Damascus?

3. **With the church being so young and with no information of the founding of a church in Damascus, how is it that Ananias is a disciple there, so trusted of the Lord?**
  
4. **What were all of the components of Paul being saved?**
  
5. **How was it that Paul was so soon enabled to preach Christ to the people, proving that Jesus was indeed the Christ?**
  
6. **Evaluate the contribution that both Ananias and Barnabas made to Paul as a new Christian.**

This lesson was prepared by Tommy Blanton, pastor of Antioch Church, Willard, N.C. [www.antiochBibleclass.org](http://www.antiochBibleclass.org).  
This lesson is prepared for use as a Sunday School lesson, study group lesson, church service lesson, personal devotional lesson, etc.