

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

(The Wolf that became a Sheep)

Acts 9:1-31

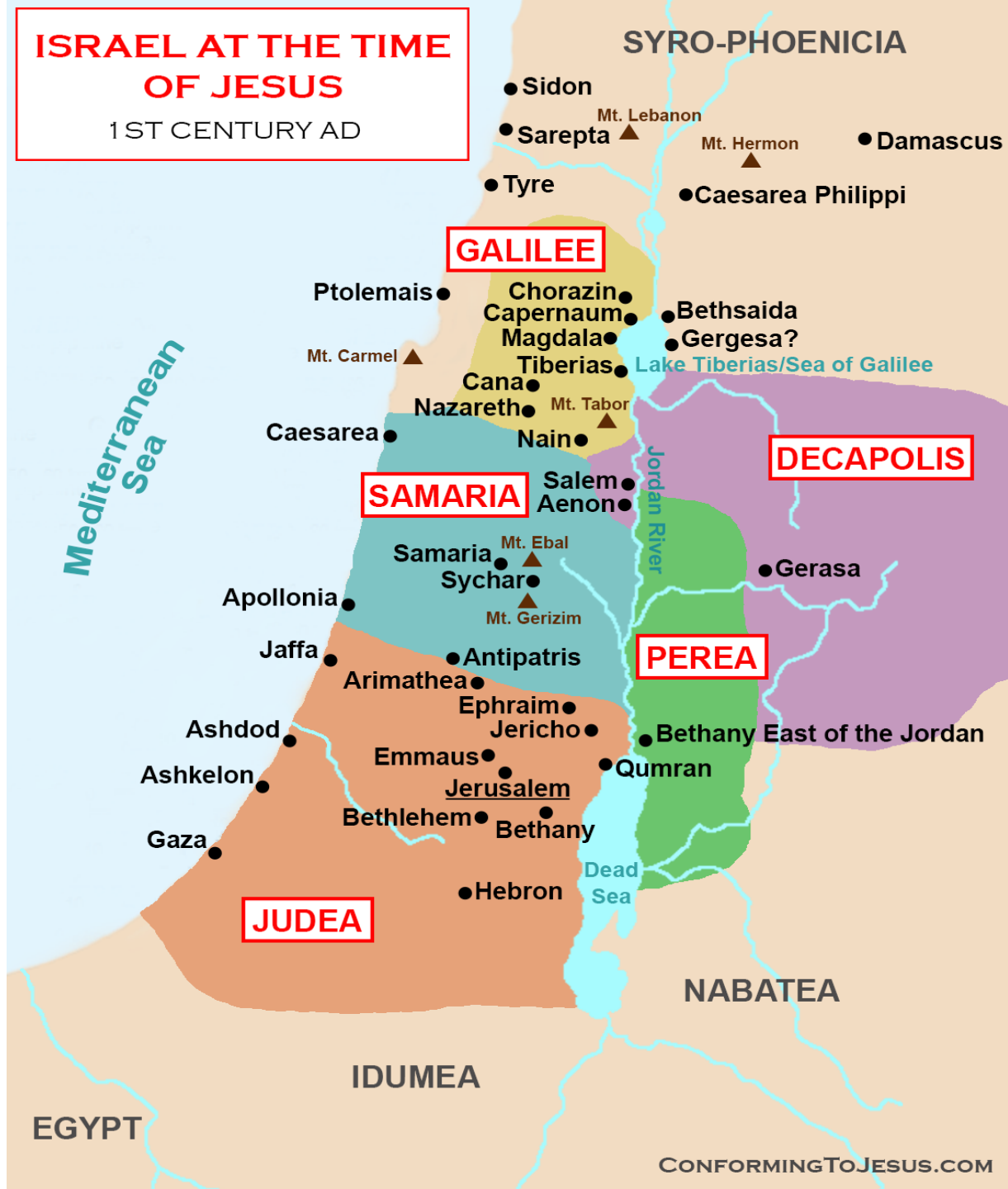
Introduction

- In our passage we learn of Saul's conversion.
- Saul was the enraged mastermind and ringleader of the persecution of Jesus' followers that broke out after Stephen's death (Acts 8:1-3).
- Persecuting Christians consumed him; it had become his whole life. The very air he was breathing was that of threats and murder against

- the disciples of the Lord.
- Under his attacks many of the Hellenist believers, who apparently bore the brunt of the persecution, fled Jerusalem.
- As the events recorded in Acts 9 unfold, Saul is hot on the trail of those who fled to Damascus, Syria.

**ISRAEL AT THE TIME
OF JESUS**

1ST CENTURY AD





Mediterranean Sea

Damascus

Tyre

Caesarea Philippi

Galilee

Capernum

Canatha

Sea of Galilee

Hippius

Dion

Nazareth

Raphana

R. Yarmuk

Gadara

Scythopolis

Pella

R. Jabbok

Gerasa

Joppa

Philadelphia

Jerusalem

Judea

Dead Sea

R. Arnon

Beersheba

THE DECAPOLIS

- By the mighty convicting power of the Holy Spirit and transforming power of God's grace, Saul will become one of the most effective preachers of Jesus Christ in the Christian era (1 Cor. 15:10).
- He will become a missionary, theologian, evangelist, pastor, organizer, leader, thinker, fighter for truth, and lover of souls, and his

- thirteen letters to various churches and Christian leaders will become a major part of the New Testament.
- So significant an event was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus that Scripture records it no less than three times (Acts 9:1-31; Acts 22:1–16; 26:4–18)!

I. Saul's misguided zeal for God leads him to Damascus, Syria (9:1-2).

^{ESV} **Acts 9:1** But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Explanation

- Saul is determined to stamp out the Jewish followers of Jesus (9:1). He had consented to the death of Stephen and personally launched an aggressive attack upon the follows of Jesus (Acts 7:58).
- He had persecuted the churches in Judea (Gal. 1:23) and had sought and obtained legal religious authority to arrest any of the Jewish followers

- of Jesus he discovered in Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial (9:2).
- If you had asked Saul the reasons for his angry persecution he might have said something like this: “Jesus of Nazareth is dead. Do you expect me to believe that a crucified false prophet is the promised Messiah? According to our Law, anybody who

- is hung on a tree is cursed [Deut. 21:23]. Would God take a cursed person and make him the Messiah? No! His followers are preaching that Jesus is both alive and doing miracles through them. But their power comes from Satan, not God. This is a dangerous sect, and I intend to eliminate it before it destroys our historic Jewish faith!”

- In spite of his great learning (Acts 26:24), Saul was spiritually blind (2 Cor. 3:12–18) and did not understand what the Old Testament really taught about the Messiah.
- Like many others of his countrymen, he stumbled over the Cross (1 Cor. 1:23) because he depended on his meticulous obedience to his understanding of the Law for

- righteousness and not on the righteousness that God provides through faith in Jesus (Rom. 9:30–10:13; Phil. 3:1–10).
- Many self-righteous religious people today do not see their need for a Savior and resent it if you tell them they are sinners

- Saul testifies later that he persecuted followers of Jesus ignorantly in unbelief – “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13).

II. Saul's encounter with the Resurrected Ascended Jesus (Acts 9:3-9).

³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he 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 rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Explanation

- A light from heaven causes Saul to fall to the ground (9:4a)
- Saul hears a voice asking, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (9:4b)
- Saul asks the voice to identify itself: "Who are you, Lord?" (9:5a)
- The answer: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter

- the city, and you will be told what you are to do." (9:5b-6)
- Suddenly Saul realizes that Jesus is truly resurrected and is alive!
- The men traveling with Saul heard the voice but saw no one. (9:7)
- Saul arises from the ground and realizes he is blind. (9:8a)
- Saul is led by the hand and brought into Damascus (9:8b)

- For three days Saul remains blind and chooses not to eat or drink. (9:9)
- It no doubt dawns on Saul that his fighting and anger was not primarily against a group of what he felt were heretical Jews, but was against the risen Christ (Messiah).
- According to 1 Corinthians 15:8, Paul saw the glorified Lord Jesus Christ. He then realized he was guilty of persecuting God's Holy Son.

- Imagine Saul's mental and emotional consternation, confusion, and unspeakable sadness of heart!

III. Ananias' encounter with the Resurrected Ascended Jesus (Acts 9:10-12).

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of

Tarsus named Saul, for behold, 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."

Explanation

- Ananias, a follower of Jesus Christ (Mat. 16:24), receives verbal instructions from Jesus in a vision (Acts 9:10).

- Jesus tells him to go to a street named “Straight” and inquire at the house of Judas for a man of Tarsus named Saul. (Acts 9:11a)
- Jesus tells Ananias that Saul is praying and has had a vision of you coming to pray for him, laying your hands on him so that he might regain his sight. (Acts 9:11b-12)

IV. Ananias' negative response to Jesus' command. (Acts 9:13-14)

¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Explanation

- Based on what Ananias had heard, he is very reluctant to do what Jesus tells him to do.

- Jesus does not usually tell us the reasons behind His instructions. However he did explain the reasons to Ananias.
- Jesus has chosen Saul to be a missionary for Jesus.(9:15a)
- Saul's mission will include Gentiles, kings, and Jewish people.(9:15b)
- Saul's mission will involve much personal suffering on Jesus' behalf.(9:16)

V. Ananias' obedience and prayer for Saul. (Acts 9:17-18a)

¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell

from his eyes, and he regained his sight.

Explanation

- Ananias, after explaining to Saul that Jesus sent him, announced the reason for his coming: “so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17)
- As a result of Ananias’ prayer, God restored Saul’s sight. (Acts 9:18a)

VI. Saul's response after his healing. (Acts 9:18b-22)

Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made

havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" ²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

Explanation

- Four things had happened to Saul.
 - 1) He is recognized as a “brother in Christ” by both Ananias and the church (Acts 9:17, 19);
 - 2) He received his sight (Acts 9:18);
 - 3) He is baptized (Acts 9:19);
 - and 4) He is filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).
- Saul’s desire for immediate baptism testifies to his spiritual transformation

- and is his pledge of loyalty to follow Jesus and His teachings. (9:18b)
- Afterwards, he eats and spend “some days” with the followers of Jesus. He no doubt discovered they were loving people, undeserving of the persecution he had inflicted on them, that they knew the truth of God’s Word and only wanted to share it with others.

- It is interesting to note in Acts 9 the different names used for God's people: **disciples** (Acts 9:1, 10, 19, 25–26, 36, 38), **those of the way** (Acts 9:2), **saints** (Acts 9:13, 32, 41), **all that call on God's name** (Acts 9:14, 21), and **brethren** (Acts 9:17, 30). We use the word *Christian* most frequently, and yet that name did not appear on the scene until later (Acts

- 11:26). “**Disciples**” is the name that is used most in the Book of Acts, but you do not find it used in the epistles. There the name “**saints**” is the most frequently used title for God’s people.
- The result of Saul being “filled with the Holy Spirit,” as Luke uses the phrase in Acts, is evidenced by his desire to be a witness for Jesus (see

- Acts 1:8) and to declare to others that Jesus is the risen Savior and truly the Son of God. He did this in the synagogues in Damascus (9:20).
- All who heard Saul preach were amazed at his transformation and message (9:21).
- Saul's heart and mind had been opened to Jesus being the Messiah

- and he is growing more and more powerful in his ability to persuasively argue from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus is indeed the promised Jewish Messiah (9:22).

VII. The unbelieving Jews plot to kill Saul at Damascus. (Acts 9:23-25)

²³ When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him, ²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

VIII. Barnabas believes in Saul's conversion and befriends him by introducing him to the apostles. (Acts 9:26-31)

²⁶ And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road

he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.²⁸ So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.²⁹ And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.³⁰ And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.³¹ So the church throughout all Judea and

Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Conclusion

- Saul's salvation should serve as a great encouragement to any lost sinner, for if "the chief of sinners" could be saved (1 Tim. 1:12-15), surely anybody can be saved!
- Saul had to recognize he was wrong, and needed Jesus to be his savior, before he was willing to put his faith in the biblical message about Jesus as the only Savior.

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