

REFLECTION GUIDE

ACTS 9:1-18 | BEFORE THE FACE OF GOD

KEY TERMS

Letters from the high priest - Paul asks for letters from the high priest in an apparent attempt to establish his authority to arrest Christians outside of Jerusalem.

The Way - A term used to describe Christians in the 1st century; Luke uses similar terms such as *the way of salvation* (16:17), *the way of the Lord* (18:25), and *the way of God* (18:26) in Acts.

A light from heaven - How Luke describes what happened when Jesus appeared to Saul/Paul in v. 3. The OT uses light imagery often to describe appearances of Yahweh (see Ex 19:16; Ezk 1:4; Dan 10:6). It appears, based on v. 7 and Paul's words later in Acts (22:14-15 & 26:16), that, unlike the onlookers who did not see anyone, Paul saw Jesus himself and not just the light.

DID YOU KNOW?

The street called *Straight* where Saul found Ananias in Judas' house (verse 11) still exists in Damascus today. It is called Darb al-Mustaqim, which means something similar to "straight" in Arabic, although the street is no longer completely straight (Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*).

BACKGROUND

After recording stories from Philip's ministry in Samaria, Luke returns to Saul, who was last seen in Acts overseeing the murder of Stephen (Acts 7:54-8:1) and arresting both male and female Christians in Jerusalem (8:3). Now, Saul wants to travel to neighboring cities and arrest more Christians (9:1-2). However, while traveling to Damascus, a city 135 miles from Jerusalem, he is knocked to the ground by *a light from heaven* (v. 3) and hears a voice say, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* (v. 4). Saul responds by saying, *Who are you, Lord?*, indicating great reverence for whoever is speaking to him, and maybe even a recognition that this voice is divine. The voice then identifies itself as Jesus (v. 5). It's interesting that Jesus says, *why are you persecuting me*, even though Saul was persecuting Christians in Jerusalem not Jesus himself. This statement from Jesus reveals an inextricable connection between Jesus and his Church, that becomes part of Paul's theology (1 Cor 12:27).

Jesus then tells Saul to *rise and enter the city* (v. 6) and, although he is now blind, Paul enters the city, fasting for three days (vv. 8-9). At the same time, a Christian named Ananias has a vision in which God tells him to find Saul, who is called by God a *chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel* (v. 15). Ananias, though initially afraid of Saul because he is aware of Saul's actions in Jerusalem (vv. 13-14), finds Saul, lays hands on him, Paul receives the Holy Spirit, regains his sight, and is baptized (vv. 17-18).

GOING DEEPER

Read Luke 15:11-32 and 19:1-10. What do these parables teach about the hope of salvation for those far from God? Read 2 Peter 3:9. What does this say about God's heart towards those who do not know him? How do these truths motivate you to pray for the lost and share the good news about Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Acts 9:1-18. Make 5-7 quick observations about these verses. What is the big idea? What stands out to you?
2. Read John 6:44 and John 15:16. How does Acts 9:1-3 shed light on these verses?
3. In verse 4, Jesus says, "Saul, Saul, why are you **persecuting me?**" What is the significance of this statement? How does Jesus' statement encourage us?
4. What changes do we see after Saul's conversion experience?

LIVING THE WORD

5. Read Romans 5:6-11. How does Saul's conversion experience shed light on his writing in Romans 5?
6. In Romans 5:6-11, Saul / Paul uses the pronoun "we" which means that you also share in this experience. While your story is different than Saul's, how do these verses shed light on your own faith journey?
7. What results or changes should be evident in our lives as a result of our conversion?
8. What is one way you want to think differently or live differently because of this passage?