

Episode: Acts Series

Narrator: Paul

Primary Scriptures: Acts 9

Story Summary: Paul's conversion and his early years as a Christian

Location: Roman Empire; Damascus, Jerusalem, Antioch, Tarsus

Time: 30 AD Death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost.

33 AD (?) Paul becomes a Christian

40 AD (?) Cornelius becomes a Christian

46 AD Paul's "famine" visit to Jerusalem, start of First Missionary Journey

Key Scriptures: Acts 9:4-5, 15-16, 17, 31

Background

After Cornelius was converted by Peter, it was clear God wanted people of all ethnic groups to become Christians. Peter was willing for that to happen, but did not seem to make it a priority. However, God had long ago decided that a young Jewish leader would head up the task of taking the Gospel message to the entire world.

Saul of Tarsus, better known today as Paul, was the man Jesus chose to lead evangelistic efforts to those outside the Jewish community. This episode is told from the vantage point of Paul as a younger man, just before the First Missionary Journey, and before he has endured intense persecution, or written any of his letters and books in the New Testament.

The Bible introduces Paul when Stephen was stoned. Apparently, Paul led the stoning of Stephen, and later became authorized by the Jewish leaders to kill other Christians in an effort to thwart the growth of the Church. Later in the Bible, Paul is described as being a leading Pharisee with a strong educational background.

Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians when Jesus intervened. Jesus temporarily blinded Paul, and Paul had to be led into the city. Ananias was sent to lead Paul to repentance and convert him to Christianity. Paul immediately became a dedicated Christian and began evangelizing to other Jews. He had to escape Damascus with the help of the Christians.

Galatians 1:16-18 describes Paul's three years in Arabia, but it does not say when these three years occurred.

With the help of Barnabas, Paul was introduced to the Christian leaders in Jerusalem, who slowly accepted him. You can imagine their reluctance to embrace him; it wasn't that long ago he had killed and persecuted them.

Paul ended this phase of life in his hometown of Tarsus, where he would stay for many years while waiting to start his active ministry to the Gentiles.

Discussion Questions:

1. When was Saul's name changed to Paul?
 - *Saul was his Hebrew name and Paul was his Roman name. People just started using his Roman name more. Luke went to the name change during the story of Sergius Paulus in Acts 13:1-9.*
2. When did Paul spend three years in the desert?
 - *Shortly after his conversion – see Galatians 1:11-24*
3. Who started Paul in his career as a foreign missionary?
 - *Barnabas and the church at Antioch – see Acts 11:25-30; Acts 13:1-3*
4. From whom did Paul seek approval before going to the Gentiles?
 - *From Peter, the Apostles, and James – see Galatians 1:18-19; Galatians 2:1-2*
5. From whom did Paul claim his ultimate authority?
 - *From Jesus – see Galatians 1:11-12*
6. Paul received an unfathomable amount of grace from God; how do you think this motivated the way he preached grace?
7. Name two primary questions facing the early Church.
 - *Which was primary – Christianity or Judaism?*
 - *Could people become Christian without following the laws of Moses?*
 - *See Acts 10 – 11:18*

Application Questions

1. Paul was responsible for countless deaths of Christians, and yet God forgave him and restored him. What do you need forgiveness for in your life? What about restoration?
2. If you had to overcome your past, like Paul, how would you do it? [change your ways, have people vouch for you, be consistent in your changed behavior, pray]
3. Paul was absolutely sure he was pleasing God by persecuting the Christians, yet this is not what God wanted. How can you have assurance that you are pleasing God with your actions?