

# First Steps In The Christian Life

Acts 9:18-30

*<sup>18</sup> Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength.*

## **Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem**

*Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. <sup>20</sup> At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. <sup>21</sup> All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" <sup>22</sup> Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.*

*<sup>23</sup> After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, <sup>24</sup> but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. <sup>25</sup> But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.*

*<sup>26</sup> When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. <sup>29</sup> He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews,<sup>[a]</sup> but they tried to kill him. <sup>30</sup> When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.*

The conversion of Saul was sudden; but it was also a striking conversion. In 1 Timothy 1:16 it says; <sup>16</sup> *But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.*

We can learn from that that there is a sense in which it was a simple conversion – the kind of thing that God can and does do. How did this man, Saul, progress after his initial encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus? Because, important as it is to start the Christian life, it is equally important to go on, to grow in Christ. 2 Peter 3:18 says; <sup>18</sup> *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

We must enter into the full purpose for which God has saved us. Today I want to talk about what happened to Saul after his conversion.

### **1. He made an open confession of allegiance to Christ (verse 18)**

It is impossible to read the book of Acts and not to be impressed with the fact that those who believed then confessed their belief and their trust in Christ by baptism.

This is the scriptural, Christ-appointed way. Matthew 28:19 says; <sup>19</sup> *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

Acts 2:38-41 goes on to say; <sup>38</sup> *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” <sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

So when Ananias came to Saul he helped him to understand the purpose of the Lord, and Saul immediately identified himself publicly with the Lord in whom he now trusted as his Savior, and to whom he had surrendered himself as his Lord and Master. Recognizing that baptism is a command of the Lord, that we must follow. John 14:15 says; <sup>15</sup> *“If you love me, keep my commands.*

This was not an option for Saul and it isn’t one for us.

## **2. He linked up with the Lord's people (verse 19)**

The great word of fellowship is the word “with”, and here we are told that Saul linked up in fellowship with the Christians at Damascus, and according to verse 26, with those in Jerusalem; and it is evident that wherever he was, from now on he sought the fellowship of the Lord's people. He was not a ‘freelance’ Christian! Every true believer should link up with a company of the Lord's people. Some Christians say, ‘I don't believe in joining a church!’ – but what would happen if every Christian said that? We must get together, pray together, work together, stay together and unite together for worship and for the spread of the gospel. We need a spiritual home; we need fellowship with other Christians, and they need fellowship with us.

## **3. He preached Christ wherever he went (verse 20)**

The words “at once” are very significant; they mean ‘without delay’. This is just how it should be. When we put our trust in the Lord we shouldn't waste any time in telling others of our Savior and of all He has done and is able to do for them. Saul became an outstanding preacher; but all of us are to be preachers in the sense that we are to tell others about the Lord, to make Him known *by the way we live and by the way we speak*.

Acts 4:20 says; <sup>20</sup>*As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”*

Saul's life was completely changed, so much so that those who heard him were astonished and he couldn't help but speak about the Lord. (verse 21)!

## **4. He grew in grace and in his knowledge of the Lord (verse 22)**

Where and how did he grow? At some point in these early stages of his new life Saul went into Arabia for approximately three years.

Galatians 1:15-18; <sup>15</sup>*But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup>to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. <sup>17</sup>I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.*

*<sup>18</sup> Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas<sup>[a]</sup> and stayed with him fifteen days.*

Probably it was fairly soon after his conversion, because it was necessary for him to get alone with the Lord and to be prepared for his future life-work. So Paul went to King's College for three years! Moses had a similar experience (Exodus 3:1); so did Elijah (1 Kings 17:3); so did John the Baptist (Luke 3:2); and even the Lord Jesus did not begin His public ministry until he was thirty years old (Luke 3:23). A good decision, especially for young people anticipating a lifetime of service for the Lord, is indicated in Acts 6:4.

*<sup>4</sup> and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

### **5. He encountered terrific opposition and persecution (verses 23-25, 29)**

What a rough time Saul had right at the start of his Christian life, and how natural it was that others should be cautious and wary about accepting him as a real convert based on his past! In contrast, how easy it is for some of us to be a Christian! How much more costly it would be if we were as determined to live and witness for Christ and to defend the gospel like Saul did, and like many today do!

There are people around the world being killed for their beliefs. How much longer do you think it will take before it happens here?

Take a good long look at Matthew 5:10-12.

*<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Are you ready to be persecuted for the gospel?

### **6. He had to face and overcome internal misunderstanding (verse 26)**

It was natural that he should receive opposition from outside, but the most difficult thing of all was to discover that even God's people were suspicious and

afraid of him, doubting the reality of his conversion. However, thank God for Barnabas (see verse 27)! As the result of the commendation of Barnabas, Saul was accepted by the Church in Jerusalem and, as verse 28 tells us, he “moved about freely” – praying with them (John 14:14); remembering the Lord in His death with them (1 Corinthians 11:23-26); and entering into all the joys of worship and of service for the Lord.

### **7. He went back to Tarsus: the hardest place of all (verses 29-30)!**

So fierce had been the opposition that verses 25 and 29 tell us that Paul’s life was in danger. The Lord permitted all this for the furtherance of the gospel. We read this in Philippians 1:12; <sup>12</sup> *Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.*

This was the case for Saul when he went back to Tarsus, to his own home, family and friends. Whether or not they welcomed him there we do not know, but what we do know is that it was an extremely good thing for him to go back to his own people and let them see and hear the great things which the Lord had done for him.

This is what the Lord told him to do and he did it.

Mark 5:19 tells us this; <sup>19</sup> *Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”*

These are some early post-conversion experiences through which Saul was led by the Lord. Are you following on to know the Lord?

Let me leave you with Hosea 6:3;

<sup>3</sup> *Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”*