

Date February 13, 2022

Scripture/Bible Story/Theme
Paul's Journeys

Children's Illustrated Bible – p. 296-297

God can change and transform lives

Workshop Name
The Road to Damascus

For the teachers:

The meaning of the story in a nutshell:

When Saul, later known as Paul, met Jesus on the Road to Damascus, his life was dramatically changed.

Encountering Jesus can transform our lives as well, if we are willing to have our eyes opened and become one of his disciples.

The following notes from the Workshop Rotation site are lengthy, but they do give a deeper understanding of Paul and that in turn may be helpful to the teachers as they teach the lessons in this unit.

Bible Background Notes for Teachers

It is easy to understand why Jesus chose to appear to Saul.

Saul was a man immersed in three cultures - Greek, Roman, and Jewish. He was trained in the scriptures as Pharisee (Acts 22). And he could support himself as a tentmaker wherever he went (Acts 18). This made Saul uniquely equipped for taking Christ's message beyond the Jewish world, and into the Greek and Roman world.

What this says to us is that our gifts, however mis-used or undeveloped, can be re-directed by Christ for his purposes, and that none of us is so damaged or "wrong" as to be beyond Christ's transformative reach.

What do we know about Saul?

Saul was born around the year 3 AD in Tarsus in southern Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. Tarsus was a bustling commercial center brimming with Greek culture, education, and philosophy. It is believed that Saul came from a relatively wealthy family because he had Roman citizenship (which could be purchased), and because his letters reveal him to be well-educated.

In Acts 22, Luke tells us that Saul was a student of Gamaliel, a famed Jewish scholar in Jerusalem. In Philippians 3, Paul describes himself as a Pharisee. Pharisees were not priests, they were students of scripture who tried to enforce their strict interpretations and practices on others, believing that their salvation came through their own right-ness ("righteousness") of belief and practice.

It is questionable how closely Saul followed Gamaliel's teachings. In Acts 5:38-39, Luke describes Gamaliel as convincing the Sanhedrin not to kill the followers of Jesus, but instead, warning them that "*If their plans and actions only come from people, they will fail. But if their plans come from God, you won't be able to stop them.*" Yet, according to Acts 7, the men who stoned Stephen "laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul."

Using a term from today's headlines, we could say that **at some point Saul became "radicalized."** By Acts 9, he is on his way with authority to persecute Jesus' followers in Damascus.

What this says to us is that no one, however, wrong or evil, is out of Jesus' reach.

Paul's Point of View on his Past and Transformation

In Philippians 3, Paul makes his case that his former point of view as a "faultless" Pharisee is now to be counted as "garbage" (waste, useless). **This theme of his world and perspective on his Jewish faith being turned upside down**, would be revisited by Paul many times. But rather than rejecting the past, he simply described it as something that was to be put in the past, The Old Testament and old ways simply prepared us for the transformation of God.

"this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14)

This theme should not be lost in our teaching. Saul was very religious, but that was not enough. Paul does not convert from one religion to another. He does not exchange one set of rules for another. **Paul's encounter with Christ transformed his entire understanding of "religion."** Instead of thinking we are saved by religious rules and practices, Paul repeatedly speaks about grace and love, forgiveness and tolerance. Paul's Good News finds its fullest expression in 1 Corinthians 13 where he describes "a more excellent way" —the way of Love.

Saul to Paul: What's in a name?

"Saul" literally means **"the one you prayed for"** or "the one you asked for" —which is reference to the people's demand for a king in 1 Samuel 8. But Saul always refers to himself by the Greek (Gentile) name of "Paul," which can be translated as **"small" or "humble."** And in numerous letters, he refers to his "weakness" and "humility." So while some commentators simply ascribe the name change to a common custom among Jewish families living in the Gentile world to have both a Hebrew and a Gentile name, we can be sure that to Paul, his Gentile name was a perspective as well.

Perhaps not so coincidentally, our students are "small" in age and stature, and their talents are only beginning to be revealed. In a world that encourages them to "be big," "be the answer to prayer" or be #1 (literally: "be Saul"), "be gifted." Paul's name change and experience points us in a different direction. **It is the upward call that humble-Paul now values, and calls us to strive for** (Philippians 3).

Opening Prayer

Thank you, Jesus for loving us and helping us to change, and giving us the church to teach us how to be your disciples. Show us the ways that we need to change, and show us how we can help other people to change. Amen

Objectives

1. Locate the story of Paul in the Book of Acts.
2. Outline the basics of Paul's story, who's in it, what happened.
3. Describe how Saul/Paul was transformed by meeting and believing in Jesus.
4. Children will locate the following places on the map: Tarsus, Damascus, Jerusalem
5. Know that Jesus' "amazing grace" reaches out even to those who resist him or hate him.
6. Discuss ways Jesus encounters us and changes us, and steps we can take to help others "see" Jesus and become his disciple.

Supplies

Pieces of construction paper that have been numbered for the stepping stones for the game, one labeled Jerusalem, one labeled Damascus and two or three labeled Surprise.

One dice

Questions to be asked – see below

Small bowl of clean water

Activity

The following vocabulary will be helpful to go over before beginning the activity.

Pharisee – Jewish leaders who were very careful to follow all of God’s laws and rules that they made up.

Gentile – someone who is not Jewish

Temple – the center of worship and religious life in Jerusalem

Synagogue – Jewish places of worship and study in cities and towns

Jerusalem – center of Jewish religious life

Damascus – one of the oldest cities in Paul’s time, where he was going when he was blinded and heard Jesus speak

Tarsus – capital city of Cilicia, in modern day Turkey, where Saul was born

Persecution – causing other people to suffer because of what they believe

“Road to Damascus!”

The object of the game is to reach the end of the path. Keep playing until all youth have finished. If the youth are progressing too slowly, remove some of the stones to make the path shorter. You can also remove some of the questions.

The stepping stones should be laid out on the floor to make a winding path (like Candyland). The first stone is “Jerusalem” and the last stone is “Damascus.” Make the stepping stones out of pieces of construction paper.

Divide the youth into teams.

To play, kids move through the path as a team. One youth rolls a dice and moves the number of steps rolled. Then they answer the question on the next card. If they get the answer right they can roll again and move on. If they don’t get the question right they lose their turn and the other player has a chance. If they land on a space named “Surprise” they must answer that question or do what the surprise card is asking them to do.

Today’s story about Saul’s turnabout takes place in what book of the Bible?

A. Matthew

B. Acts or Acts of the Apostles

C. 1 Samuel

True or False: The book of Acts is in the Old Testament

What was Saul’s religion?

A. He was a Jew.

B. He was a Christian.

C. He worshiped the Roman gods.

What was Saul's hometown?

- A. Jerusalem
- B. Damascus
- C. Tarsus

What did Saul think about Jesus' followers?

- A. Opposed them, hated them
- B. Wanted to be more like them
- C. Thought they were wrong but respected their beliefs

What did Saul do to Jesus' followers?

- A. Argued with them to convince them they were wrong
- B. Arrested them, jailed them, killed them
- C. Helped them escape from the soldiers.

Why was Saul traveling to Damascus?

- A. To kill the Christians there.
- B. To arrest the Christians there and bring them back to Jerusalem
- C. To learn from the Christians there

When Saul was on the road, what did he see?

- A. Jesus
- B. A bright light
- C. An angel

When the bright light flashed around Saul he fell to the ground and heard a voice. Who was speaking?

- A. Ananias
- B. His traveling companions
- C. Jesus

What was the first thing Jesus said to Saul?

- A. Saul, Saul, Why are you being so cruel to me?
- B. Saul, Saul, don't be afraid.
- C. Saul, Saul, turn around and go back to Jerusalem.

What did Saul say to Jesus?

- A. What do you want me to do?
- B. I'm sorry I was so cruel to you.
- C. Who are you?

What did Jesus tell Saul to do?

- A. Go back to Jerusalem and let the Christians out of jail.
- B. Go to Damascus and wait to be told what to do
- C. Go to see Ananias

What happened to Saul's eyes after he saw the bright light?

- A. They changed from brown to blue
- B. He opened them but could not see a thing
- C. He opened them and everything was blurry

How did Saul get to Damascus?

- A. He rode on a donkey
- B. He was led by the hand
- C. He was carried by his traveling companions

What did Saul do for three days in Damascus

- A. Fasted and prayed
- B. Sang and worshiped Jesus
- C. Talked to Christians

Whom did Jesus send to heal Saul in Damascus?

- A. Paul
- B. Ananias
- A. Judas

Why was Ananias worried about doing what Jesus asked?

- a. He was afraid of Saul because of the things Saul had done.
- b. He was mad at Saul and didn't want to help him.
- c. He thought the other Christians wouldn't like it

What did Jesus tell Ananias about Saul?

- A. I have chosen him to be the new king of Israel.
- B. I have chosen him to be my favorite disciple.
- C. I have chosen him to tell people about me.

What did Ananias do?

- A. Went to Saul, touched his eyes so he could see again.
- B. Ran and hid.
- C. Had Saul arrested and put in jail.

What did Saul do after he could see again?

- a. He went out to arrest Christians.
- b. He went out to apologize to Christians for the things he had done.
- c. He was baptized.

Why did Saul have two names?

- A. Jesus changed his name from Saul to Paul.
- B. Saul was his first name and Paul was his middle name.
- C. He had a Jewish name, Saul and a Roman name, Paul

Surprise cards

When Saul saw the bright light, he fell to the ground. Fall down!

Ananias put his hands on Saul to heal him. Put your hands on another player.

The men traveling with Saul heard Jesus's voice but didn't see anything. Do what they did while Paul was talking to Jesus. (Stand there speechless.)

Saul was baptized. Baptize each other. One youth to dip their hands in clean water and sprinkle each other.

Someone led Saul by the hand to Damascus. Get a partner. One of you close your eyes and let the other lead you to the wall and back.

After Saul was baptized, he ate for the first time in three days. Eat this. Youth pretend to eat something.

Reflection/Evaluation

What do you think was going through Saul's mind when he realized Jesus, the one he had hated, really was the Son of God? How would you have felt?

Lord's Prayer