

# Confronted by the Gospel of Jesus

## Summary and Goal

Jesus confronts unbelievers so they might trust in Him, and He calls them to live on mission for Him as part of His church. God also employs believers to pray for, evangelize, disciple, and commission the people God brings into His church. In this session, we will see from Ananias's reaction to God's command that Saul was an inconceivable choice to be saved, much less lead the mission of taking the gospel to the Gentiles. No one would have foreseen his conversion. Yet God specializes in enlisting enemies to His service and uniting us with His church. Yes, Saul was not the last rebel God saved and commissioned; every believer follows this pattern, including you and me.

## Session Outline

1. Confronted by the Savior (Acts 9:3-9)
2. Called for a Mission (Acts 9:10-16)
3. United with Believers (Acts 9:17-20)

*Background Passage: Acts 9:1-30*

## Session in a Sentence

Jesus confronts unbelievers to trust in Him and calls them to live on mission for Him as part of His church.

## Christ Connection

The conversion and calling of Saul is a demonstration of God's power to save. Through an encounter with the crucified and risen Jesus, this once-hardened persecutor of God's people began his journey to becoming perhaps the greatest missionary the world has ever known. Only the gospel can transform a public opponent of Christ into a fervent witness to His salvation.

## Missional Application

Because we were once estranged from God but are now His children through Jesus, we pray for the salvation of others with full confidence that God can transform even the hardest heart.

# Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

## Introduction

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the paragraphs on page 103 in the DDG to raise the idea that God is willing and able to stop people, both believers and unbelievers, in their tracks in order to call them closer to Himself.

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Thank God that He periodically stops us in our tracks! Not every disruption we experience in life is a force of evil sent to derail believers. Every now and then, the interruption is God directing us toward our life's mission as Christians.

God is also able and willing to stop unbelievers in their tracks. No shell so thick, no sin so big, no guilt so deep can prevent God from breaking through and interrupting a sinner's plans and steps. No one—even those most inoculated against or most hostile to the claims of Christianity—is outside the reach of our Lord. Yet God is so kind that He will not conquer by force that which He does not first confront by grace.

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**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

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How has God used unusual circumstances in your life to clarify His call and purpose for your life? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

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**SUMMARIZE:** Jesus confronts unbelievers so they might trust in Him, and He calls them to live on mission for Him as part of His church. God also employs believers to pray for, evangelize, disciple, and commission the people God brings into His church. In this session, we will see from Ananias's reaction to God's command that Saul was an inconceivable choice to be saved, much less lead the mission of taking the gospel to the Gentiles. No one would have foreseen his conversion. Yet God specializes in enlisting enemies to His service and uniting us with His church. Yes, Saul was not the last rebel God saved and commissioned; every believer follows this pattern, including you and me.

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## Point 1: Confronted by the Savior (Acts 9:3-9)

**READ** Acts 9:3-9 (DDG p. 104).

<sup>3</sup> As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

<sup>5</sup> “Who are you, Lord?” Saul said. “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting,” he replied. <sup>6</sup> “But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

<sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> He was unable to see for three days and did not eat or drink.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 104) to emphasize that God has power to reach anybody, even His staunchest opponents.

In Acts 9 we learn a lesson about the prevailing power of heaven, the deliberate movement of God, and the humility of humanity in response. Saul had garnered favor among the religious rulers and acquired clout for his audacious threats against the church, but when the time was right, a sudden light from heaven and the voice of the risen Savior forever changed Saul’s life. Jesus called the one persecuting Him to come to Him in faith and obey.

- The action in Acts 9 is swift and unexpected to Saul, and to us. But we should never think that God takes too long to move. When God moves upon the will of human beings, He does so purposefully and decisively. For a time and for His own purposes, the Lord had allowed Saul of Tarsus to stand arrogantly at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and to wreak havoc upon the church through threats and imprisonment. (The result was a scattering of believers and the gospel going out to the Samaritans [Acts 8:1-5].) But what seems sudden to us is long known to or even arranged by God Himself. So in His timing, Jesus called to Saul to believe in and obey the resurrected Savior.
- The humbled response of Saul of Tarsus to the bright, blinding light is the subject of conversion, as he fell to the ground and asked his question in ignorance. Every encounter with Christ demands a recognition of who is really in charge. That someone is not you or me. Saul, who was high in the eyes of men, was brought low before the voice of Jesus Christ. God will use no one who does not first come to realize his or her utter insecurity before Him. And God will not contend with human pride forever. The wisdom of the Scriptures teaches that we should voluntarily humble ourselves to God’s calling.

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**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 104).

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**Calling:** The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the **gospel** and internally through the **Holy Spirit** working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are **essential**, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ.

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**Essential Doctrine “Calling”:** The calling of God to salvation happens in two ways: externally through the proclamation of the **gospel** and internally through the **Holy Spirit** working in the heart of the person who hears. Both of these callings are **essential**, and both work together to bring someone to faith in Christ (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 104) to show how Jesus’ words to Saul communicate that the church belongs to Jesus.

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Saul did not think his reign of terror on the fledgling church was a war waged against God Himself, that is until the resurrected Jesus named Himself as the subject of Saul’s terrorism. Jesus is the head of the church, and He will stand up for His body. Yet while Jesus could have confronted Saul with force to kill and judge this persecutor, He confronted Saul with grace instead. He loved this religious zealot by confronting him, stopping him in his tracks, and calling him to join His church and mission.

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- While on the ground, Saul and his companions heard the sound, but the men saw no one. More than sight, more than touch, more than taste, in the realm of faith, hearing might be our most important sense. Knowing the Lord’s voice is, in part, the goal of the Christian life so we might hear and obey what He says.
  - Saul knew enough to understand that the voice in the light should be honored, so he asked this “Lord” who He was, and the Lord Jesus answered: “I am Jesus.” What an introduction! With these words, it seems the Great I AM, the “LORD God” of the Old Testament, the way, the truth, and the life, revealed Himself to His enemy with grace so Saul could know the gravity and weight of his error.
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**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

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What are some reasons we might consider people unqualified to be called by God? (unbelief; past sins; present sins; lack of skills, talents, or gifts; hostile attitude; hatred for Jesus and His church)

## Point 2: Called for a Mission (Acts 9:10-16)

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Acts 9:10-16 (DDG p. 105).

<sup>10</sup> There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” “Here I am, Lord,” he replied.

<sup>11</sup> “Get up and go to the street called Straight,” the Lord said to him, “to the house of Judas, and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. <sup>12</sup> In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and placing his hands on him so that he may regain his sight.”

<sup>13</sup> “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. <sup>16</sup> I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 105) to highlight how unexpected it was that God would use Saul as part of His plan for spreading the gospel. *Apply* this for your group that they would not count anyone out of God’s reach or His service.

God’s providence works in ways unexpected by us as He accomplishes His plan to reach the world with the gospel. With Saul, the Lord would call a Jewish zealot to commit himself to sharing the good news of Jesus with non-Jewish people. A rigorous Pharisee would now count his pedigree as trash in comparison to knowing the gospel truth he would proclaim to Jews and Gentiles alike (Phil. 3:3-11). But first, the Lord would use the people Saul came to persecute to become his teachers, his supporters, and his safety net.

- God called Saul into Christian service in two stages: first through the appearance of Jesus and then through the work of His church. God used a disciple whom Saul would have despised to make a disciple out of Saul. Only God can do this unexpected, miraculous work.

*Application:* Saul knew instructions were coming in Damascus (Acts 9:6), but God gave the details of Saul’s calling to Ananias. God wanted Ananias to know the potential of God’s work through the rebel Saul before Saul could even conceive of the unimaginable future that awaited him. This is an encouragement for the church: Those who are far from God might be the most promising tools in the hands of God to reach people and the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We should never count people out. Who knows what God might do with the life of a scoffer turned believer?

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.



What are some unexpected ways you have seen God work in your life or the lives of others? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 105) to comment on the need for believers to stay on mission and obey God’s instructions regardless of the circumstances or suffering that may come as a part of God’s calling.

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The Lord told Ananias to go to Saul so that Saul could go to the Jews and the Gentiles with the gospel of Jesus. But Ananias was fearful of the man who had been sent to arrest and punish Christians. Perhaps Ananias could have understood a call to go rebuke and announce condemnation upon Saul, but he was being sent because God had plans to draft Saul, a top persecutor, as a top pick for the next extension of the gospel mission. God had a calling for both Ananias and Saul, and both would need to obey and go in spite of the suffering to come.

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- God gave Ananias some startling insight as a part of His instruction: Saul was God’s chosen instrument, a container or vessel in which to carry the message of the gospel. God was calling an avowed enemy into His own service. A calling is not a self-initiated vocational decision, nor is it the purview of the church. God is the One who calls; God is the One who plans our steps.
  - Every call has its shade of suffering. Ananias was called to face and overcome his fear to obey the Lord’s command to go to Saul. Saul would face numerous sufferings—emotional, physical, and spiritual—throughout his gospel ministry (2 Cor. 11:23-28). Believers are prone to glamorize the Christian life and mission rather than be honest about it. But every believer is called by God to a life of faith and ministry; therefore, every believer will suffer difficulty of some sort. Hardship may come through specific persecution, or it may come through living faithfully in difficult circumstances, such as the recent global pandemic. Through it all, we must know that suffering in the call is not an indication of the absence of God. Suffering is included in the call in the first place, and God never abandons His children.
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**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

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What are some ways believers may experience suffering as a part of their calling? (persecution; ridicule; temptation; death; lack of resources; sickness; distance from family, friends, and church)

### Point 3: United with Believers (Acts 9:17-20)

**READ** Acts 9:17-20 (DDG p. 106).

<sup>17</sup> Ananias went and entered the house. He placed his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road you were traveling, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>18</sup> At once something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. <sup>19</sup> And after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some time. <sup>20</sup> Immediately he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues: “He is the Son of God.”

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 106) to identify Ananias as a **tipping-point Christian**.

Ananias is not widely featured in the New Testament, appearing only here in the Scriptures, but Acts 9 suggests that he was a **tipping-point Christian** nonetheless. Ananias’s obedience to the strange call of God unleashed the mission to the Gentiles and resulted in the Bible books of Ephesians, Galatians, Romans, and more later written by Saul. This seemingly small step of faith blessed a man, the church, and the world.

- Every Christian who obeys the call of God is a **tipping-point Christian**. Every decision to obey God, even in the strange matters, gets us closer to fulfilling the multifaceted will of God for the earth and humanity. We change the world through our faithful actions of obedience. Like a domino that falls upon its neighbor and starts a chain-reaction, the church on the go is the church on the grow.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 106) to highlight the unity in the church brought about by the gospel.

Of all the terms Ananias could have chosen to describe Saul, he chose one that reflected his own faith that what God said about Saul was true—he called Saul “brother”! Saul, who was the angel of death, was now called a close intimate relative. Only the gospel can do that, truly. These two people had little in common to bring them into a unified mission, except that the Lord Jesus had called both of them into His grace and salvation. Thank God that He unites us with other believers in His church. We all need brothers and sisters who welcome, encourage, and show us the way of faith.



#### Voices from Church History

“We who formerly hated and murdered one another and did not even share our hearth with those of a different tribe because of their customs, now, after Christ’s appearance, live together and share the same table. Now we pray for our enemies and try to win those who hate us.”<sup>1</sup>

—Justin Martyr (c. 100-165)

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- None of us, not even Saul (also known as the apostle Paul), can navigate the course of ministry on our own. God has designed the life of faith this way. We all need other believers to partner with us, pray for us, and encourage us. Saul awaited Ananias to pray for him so the scales would fall from his eyes. Similarly, we need the church. Where would any of us be if not for the voice of the faithful at critical junctures in our lives? We fool ourselves by thinking that the Christian life is a lone-ranger venture. Instead, this journey is an interconnected fellowship in which believers mutually benefit from one another as we minister in the power of the same Holy Spirit and the name of our one Savior, Jesus Christ.

*Illustration:* Frederick Douglass worked for abolition on the grounds of the Christian faith, and his work helped to change the United States.<sup>2</sup> The churches that united with him in the faith, afforded him a platform, and listened to his prophetic messages had scales fall from their eyes as they came to grips with the plight of the American slave. What sins and injustices would we be able to perceive and even end if believers from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation sincerely united with one another? By faith in Jesus, we are inextricably woven together as the family of God, being brothers and sisters in Christ, yet our common enemy uses the weapon of silly, perennial divisions to keep us separated on a myriad of issues.

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**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 106).

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**Unity of the Church:** Christ’s desire for the church is that we be united as one in Him by the **gospel**, reflecting the oneness of our trinitarian God. As such, we are to allow for no divisions to separate us, such as ethnicity, socioeconomics, nationality, language, politics, or secondary doctrinal beliefs, but to celebrate the **diversity** of God’s people made one in Christ.

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**Essential Doctrine “Unity of the Church”:** Christ’s desire for the church is that we be united as one in Him by the **gospel** (Phil. 2:1-2), reflecting the oneness of our trinitarian God (John 17:20-23). As such, we are to allow for no divisions to separate us (1 Cor. 1:10), such as ethnicity, socioeconomics, nationality, language, politics, or secondary doctrinal beliefs. Our objective is not simply to work around or look past these differences within the body of Christ but to celebrate the **diversity** of God’s people made one in Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4-6,11-13), demonstrating humility (Rom. 12:3,16; Phil. 2:5-11) and freely loving and forgiving one another (Col. 3:13-14) to reflect the power of Christ who reconciles all things to Himself (Ps. 133:1; Eph. 1:10; 2:14).

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**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.



What are some ways believers can demonstrate their unity in Christ with other believers? (**fellowship together in worship and in mission; acts of compassion for one another in the midst of struggles and hardship; pray for one another; give of money and possessions to support believers in need; listen to one another**)

# My Mission

**EXPLAIN:** God called a rebel opposing His church to be a servant within His church and a missionary to the world. How great is our God! This was the beginning of an evangelism explosion among the Gentiles. Before this time, the Jewish believers did not understand God’s enormous desire to reach the unreachable. So in His wise care, God changed the most unreachable among them—Saul (1 Tim. 1:12-17). When God does the surprising among us, He expects us to join in with Him and other believers to advance His kingdom. And just as with Saul after his conversion, there is no time like the present to proclaim Jesus and the salvation He has won for us (Acts 9:20).

**READ** the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 107), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we were once estranged from God but are now His children through Jesus, we pray for the salvation of others with full confidence that God can transform even the hardest heart.

- **What has God spoken to your heart through Saul’s conversion that will motivate you to belief and action?**
- **What are some ways your group/church should welcome and minister to new believers?**
- **For whom will you pray regularly that God will call him or her to salvation and reach with His grace?**



## Voices from Church History

“For this passage indicates the ardent desire that Christ has for the salvation of all humankind, revealed and proclaimed to all—especially in seeking the lost sheep ... This brings us consolation intertwined with instruction, that we should work rather to save sinners than to destroy them, and not follow those who, when glorying in their fervent zeal of God’s glory, rashly reject and condemn all those whom they see once to have swerved from the way of truth.”<sup>3</sup>

—Rudolf Gwalther (1519-1586)

**CLOSE IN PRAYER:** Father, such amazing grace You have shown us through Your Son—for while we were still sinners and enemies, Christ died for us and rose from the dead. Now we are called to faith in Jesus and participation in His mission. Help us to hear You, help us to see with Your eyes, and help us to obey with boldness from the Holy Spirit the call to share the gospel. Amen.

**PACK ITEM 12: THE WORST OF SINNERS:** Cut out these bookmarks and pass them out to group members to remind them of the significance of Saul’s conversion—God can save anyone.

**INSTRUCT:** As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 108-110), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 111) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.

# Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 111) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

## Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 108-110) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 1** as a part of point 1 in the session: **You don't have enough rebellion to outrun God's grace to forgive you. So admit it and believe it: The resurrected Jesus knows you. He is not afraid of or put off by your rebellion.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 2:** "Aim to be the kind of Christian who can play a bigger role in God's grand narrative even if you have a smaller part."
- **Day 4:** "The church represents Christ well when the change we demonstrate is authentic and antithetical to the lives we once lived."



Visit [www.GospelProject.com/Blog](http://www.GospelProject.com/Blog) for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

## Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 111) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to talk over with one another how their specific roles in the local church and in general ministry fit into the bigger picture.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

# Additional Commentary

## Point 1: Confronted by the Savior (Acts 9:3-9)

“Suddenly [Saul] saw a blinding light, brighter even than the midday sun (9:3). Later he would recall this experience and interpret it as a revelation of Jesus Christ (17,27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). Overwhelmed, he fell to the ground. Then he heard a voice from heaven addressing him by his Jewish name *Saul*. Saul would have had no doubt that God himself was speaking his name, for the rabbis taught that a voice from heaven could bring a rebuke or an instruction from God. But the question *Why do you persecute me?* (9:4; 26:14) must have shocked him since he sincerely believed that he had been defending God’s laws. So he tremulously asked *Who are you, Lord?* (9:5a) ... In this context, the title ‘Lord’ is simply a respectful term, equivalent to ‘Sir.’ He must have been even more shocked when the answer came, *I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting* (9:5b). Saul had been struck blind, but his physical blindness underscores the point that his inner eyes had now been opened.”<sup>4</sup>

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“Jesus’ reference to Saul’s **‘persecuting me’** shows his close identity with his followers: to persecute Christians was to persecute Christ. **‘Who are you, Lord?’** Though Paul was ultimately blinded by the bright light (cf. vv. 3,8-9), he indicates elsewhere that he actually saw the risen Christ on this occasion (see 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Gal. 1:16; cf. Acts 9:27). The scene is significant not only because of Saul’s conversion but also because it shows that he would have known of the resurrection from direct experience of Jesus and thus could come to appreciate why this was a key part of the Christian message (see 1 Corinthians 15).”<sup>5</sup>

## Point 2: Called for a Mission (Acts 9:10-16)

“Let no one imagine that Ananias speaks in disbelief of what was said or because he imagines that Christ was deceived. Far from it! Rather, afraid and trembling, he did not even pay attention to what was said, once he heard the name Paul. Moreover, the Lord did not say that he has blinded him. Fear had already taken hold of Ananias’s soul at the mention of Paul’s name. ‘Look,’ he says, ‘to whom you are betraying me. “Indeed he came here for this very purpose,” to arrest all who invoke your name. I fear he shall take me to Jerusalem. Why do you cast me into the mouth of the lion?’ He is terrified even as he speaks these words, so that we may learn from all sides the excellence of the man. For it is not surprising that these things were said by Jews, but that these men should be so terrified shows very great proof of the power of God. Both the fear is shown and the obedience that is greater after the fear. For there was indeed need of strength.”<sup>6</sup>

“When Paul travels to Damascus to persecute Christians, he encounters a ‘light from heaven [that] flashed around him’ (9:3). Where God manifested himself to individuals and Israel in the Old Testament, Christ manifests himself to Paul. His encounter with the risen Lord shapes his understanding of the Old Testament, God’s covenant with Israel, and his expectations of the long-awaited Messiah. In short, Paul’s understanding of the history of redemption arises from his Damascus Road experience. At the Damascus Road encounter, Paul quickly grasps that Christ is the Messiah, the one who has begun to redeem Israel. But Christ is more than a messiah; he is the divine Son of Man who has conquered and sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father ruling over the cosmos. Two Old Testament texts were probably in Paul’s mind as he beheld Christ in a vision—Ezekiel 1:26-28 and Daniel 7:13. Both of these prominent Old Testament texts enigmatically present a human figure as divine. With a new understanding of Christ and how he fits into God’s plan of redemption, Paul then discovers his role. By tracing Luke’s description of Paul’s conversion and commission on the Damascus Road, we discern that Paul, in some way, embodies Isaiah’s suffering servant. The apostle Paul is commissioned to bring the good news to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Isa. 49:1-6), suffer for the sake of his people (Acts 9:16; Isa. 52:13–53:12), and experience blindness and restoration of sight (Acts 9:8,18; Isa. 42:18-20). It is no coincidence that Paul closely resembles Isaiah’s famed suffering servant and Israel. Jesus is the ultimate servant who fulfills God’s mission to Israel and to the Gentiles . . . Paul’s ministry, therefore, resembles Jesus’ role as the servant. Paul, too, will embody the mission of Isaiah’s servant by suffering and restoring Israel.”<sup>7</sup>

### Point 3: United with Believers (Acts 9:17-20)

“The ordering of events in Saul’s conversion may have been altered from the standard pattern so that baptism rather than the filling of the Holy Spirit was the final event. The process may have been extended over several days rather than occurring all at once. But the result was the same: Saul became a follower of Jesus Christ. Saul stayed **in Damascus for some time**, likely becoming oriented to basic Christianity even as **he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues**. He gave priority to the synagogues throughout his ministry, starting there before being forced to take the message elsewhere.”<sup>8</sup>

### References

1. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67, quoted in *The Early Christians in Their Own Words*, edited by Eberhard Arnold (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing, 2011), 83.
2. See “The Radical Christian Faith of Frederick Douglass,” by D. H. Dilbeck, *Christianity Today*, December 21, 2017, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/january-february/frederick-douglass-at-200-remembering-his-radical-christian.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/january-february/frederick-douglass-at-200-remembering-his-radical-christian.html).
3. Rudolf Gwalther, Homily 65, Acts 9:10-16, quoted in *Acts*, eds. Esther Chung-Kim and Todd R. Hains, vol. 6 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014) [Wordsearch].
4. Babu Immanuel Venkataraman, “Acts,” in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1475.
5. John B. Polhill, “Acts,” in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2098-99, n. 9:4; n. 9:5.
6. Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles* 20, *Acts*, ed. Francis Martin, vol. V in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 106 [Wordsearch].
7. G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 166-67.
8. Stanley E. Porter, “Acts,” in *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2017), 1735, n. 9:17-18; n. 9:19-20.