Saul on the Damascus Road: The Persecutor Called

Bible Stories Anthology — Acts 9:1-31

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Author: John Lobota

Research Assistant: Claude Cowork

papertiq@bellsouth.net

> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

The Last Man Anyone Would Have Chosen

If the believers in Jerusalem had drawn up a list of men who would never become followers of Jesus, one name would have been at the top. Saul of Tarsus had held the coats while Stephen was stoned. He had gone from house to house, dragging men and women off to prison. He had voted for believers to be put to death. And now, not content with Jerusalem, he was on his way to Damascus with letters from the high priest, to arrest any followers of Jesus he could find there and bring them back in chains.

He never arrived as the man who set out. At noon, a few miles from the city, a light brighter than the sun knocked him to the ground, and a voice asked him a question he could not answer: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He got up blind. Three days later, a frightened believer laid hands on him and called him "Brother." Within weeks he was preaching Jesus in the very synagogues where he had meant to arrest people.

God chose the enemy of the church to become its greatest apostle — and He did it so that no one, ever afterward, could think himself too far gone for the grace of God.

The Setting

When. Not long after Stephen's death — probably within a year or two of Pentecost. The persecution that began with Stephen had scattered the believers across Judaea and Samaria and beyond (Acts 8:1-4).

Who Saul was. A Jew born in Tarsus, the chief city of Cilicia (in what is now southern Turkey), a proud centre of Greek learning. He was **"of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee"** (Philippians 3:5), educated in Jerusalem **"at the feet of Gamaliel"** (Acts 22:3), the most respected rabbi of his day, and a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:28). He was named Saul after Israel's

first king, who also came from the tribe of Benjamin. He also carried a Roman name, Paul — but Luke does not begin to use it until Acts 13:9, when Saul's mission turns toward the Gentile world. His name was not changed at his conversion; Acts simply calls him by his other name once his work among the Gentiles begins.

What he believed he was doing. Saul was not a cynic. He was sincere — and sincerely wrong. **"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"** (Acts 26:9). To a Pharisee, a crucified man could not be the Messiah; the Law said, "he that is hanged is accursed of God" (Deuteronomy 21:23). Preaching such a man as Lord looked like blasphemy, and Saul meant to stamp it out.

Damascus. One of the oldest cities in the world, about 150 miles north-east of Jerusalem — roughly a week's journey. It had a large Jewish community with many synagogues, and believers had already fled there or been won there.

"This way." Before they were called "Christians" (Acts 11:26), the believers were known as those "of the Way" (Acts 19:9, 23; 24:14) — people who followed the way of Jesus.

The administration. The age of grace had begun at Pentecost. But the full truth of this administration — that Jews and Gentiles would be one body in Christ — had not yet been revealed. God was about to call the man to whom He would reveal it.

The Story, Told Faithfully

Breathing Out Threatenings

> **Acts 9:1** *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,*
>
> **Acts 9:2** *And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

"Yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter." Even after Stephen's death, Saul was still breathing it — threats and murder were the very air he took in and let out. This is a **metaphor**, speaking of one thing as another: his hatred was as constant as his breath. Later, before King Agrippa, he admitted, **"being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities"** (Acts 26:11).

"Letters to Damascus to the synagogues." The high priest had authority over Jewish communities in religious matters, and his letters would tell the synagogue leaders in Damascus to hand believers over to Saul.

"Whether they were men or women." Saul spared no one. He meant to bring them **"bound unto Jerusalem"** to be tried before the council.

A Light From Heaven

> **Acts 9:3** *And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:*
>
> **Acts 9:4** *And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

> **Acts 9:5** *And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*
>
> **Acts 9:6** *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

"Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven." Paul later told the details: it was **"about noon"** (Acts 22:6), at the brightest hour of the day, and the light was **"above the brightness of the sun"** (Acts 26:13). He saw the risen Christ Himself. Years later he wrote, **"have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"** (1 Corinthians 9:1), and he named himself among the witnesses of the resurrection: **"last of all he was seen of me also"** (1 Corinthians 15:8).

"Saul, Saul." The name doubled — the figure of speech called **epizeuxis**, the same word repeated for emphasis and feeling. God called **"Abraham, Abraham"** on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:11), **"Moses, Moses"** from the burning bush (Exodus 3:4), and **"Samuel, Samuel"** in the night (1 Samuel 3:10). It is the voice of urgent love, not only of rebuke. Paul tells us the Lord spoke **"in the Hebrew tongue"** (Acts 26:14).

"Why persecutest thou me?" Not "why do you persecute My followers," but "why do you persecute *Me*?" Saul had never laid a hand on Jesus. But every believer he dragged to prison belonged to Christ. What is done to His people is done to Him. Paul would later teach that believers are **"members of his body"** (Ephesians 5:30) — and the first time he heard that truth, he heard it with his face in the dirt.

"Who art thou, Lord?" "Lord" here may have been, at first, a word of respect to a heavenly being he did not yet recognize. The answer shattered everything he believed: **"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."** The crucified man was alive, and speaking from heaven. Everything Stephen had said was true.

A note about the King James wording here. The words **"it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him"** are not found in any Greek manuscript of Acts 9. They came into the printed Greek text in the 1500s from the Latin Bible. But they are not invented: Jesus did say, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," as Paul himself reports in Acts 26:14, and Paul did ask, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). They belong to the event, told in the other two accounts.

"Kick against the pricks." A "prick" was an ox goad — a long pointed stick a farmer used to steer his ox. A stubborn ox that kicked back at the goad only drove the point into itself. It was a well-known saying in the Greek world. Saul was not hurting Jesus as much as he was hurting himself by fighting against God. As this series understands it, the goads had been at work for some time — Stephen's shining face, his speech, his prayer for his killers.

"Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." The man who had come to give orders in Damascus would now go there to receive them.

Blind for Three Days

> **Acts 9:7** *And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*
>
> **Acts 9:8** *And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*
>
> **Acts 9:9** *And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

“Hearing a voice, but seeing no man.” Paul later said of the same men, **“they heard not the voice of him that spake to me”** (Acts 22:9). This is not a contradiction. In Greek, the verb “to hear” can take its object in two different forms (cases). In Acts 9:7 “voice” is in the genitive case, which with this verb normally means hearing a *sound*. In Acts 22:9 it is in the accusative case, which normally means hearing and *understanding the words*. His companions heard the sound of a voice, but they could not make out what was said. Only Saul received the message.

“When his eyes were opened, he saw no man.” A sad irony: his eyes were open and he saw nothing. **“I could not see for the glory of that light”** (Acts 22:11). The man who had come to lead others away in chains was himself **“led by the hand.”**

“Three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.” Three days of darkness and fasting. Everything Saul had been sure of was gone. He had to face the fact that he had been fighting against God. And he prayed.

Ananias

> **Acts 9:10** *And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.*
>
> **Acts 9:11** *And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,*
>
> **Acts 9:12** *And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.*

“A certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias.” An ordinary believer — not an apostle, not an elder, just a disciple. Paul later described him as **“a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there”** (Acts 22:12).

“Behold, I am here, Lord.” The ready answer of a servant: “Here I am.”

“The street which is called Straight.” A long straight street ran east to west through the middle of Damascus, lined with colonnades. It is still there, and still called Straight Street. God gave Ananias a street, a house, and a name.

“For, behold, he prayeth.” The Lord told Ananias the one thing that could make him believe it: Saul of Tarsus was praying.

“And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias.” God had prepared both men at once — Saul to receive, Ananias to go.

> **Acts 9:13** *Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:*
>
> **Acts 9:14** *And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.*
>
> **Acts 9:15** *But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:*
>
> **Acts 9:16** *For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.*

“Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done.” Ananias was honest with the Lord. He knew exactly who Saul was and why he had come. Going to him looked like walking into a trap.

“He is a chosen vessel unto me.” A **vessel** is a jar or container — a **metaphor** for a person God fills and uses. “Chosen” is the word for picking out, selecting. The man Ananias feared was the man God had chosen. (Notice that the Lord spoke these words to *Ananias*, about Saul. Later Paul recounted what the Lord said to him directly: “I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness… unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:16-18).)

“To bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.” The Gentiles are named first. Saul would stand before governors, King Agrippa, and at last Caesar’s court in Rome.

“For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” The man who made others suffer would suffer for the name he had fought. Scripture is honest from the start: God’s choosing did not mean an easy road. Paul later listed beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, prisons and dangers without number (2 Corinthians 11:23-27) — and counted them worth it.

Brother Saul

> **Acts 9:17** *And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.*
>
> **Acts 9:18** *And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.*
>
> **Acts 9:19** *And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.*

“And Ananias went his way.” He obeyed, afraid or not.

“Putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul.” The first word the persecutor heard from a believer was *brother*. Before Saul had preached a word or proved anything, Ananias welcomed him into the family of God. It may be one of the bravest and kindest words in the Bible.

“The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way.” Ananias named the One who had sent him, and confirmed what Saul had seen.

“That thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.” Two things: sight restored to his eyes, and the gift of holy spirit received within. Luke does not tell us here what followed the filling, but Paul himself later wrote, **“I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all”** (1 Corinthians 14:18).

“There fell from his eyes as it had been scales.” “As it had been” marks a **simile**. Something like flakes or scales fell away, and he could see. Luke, who was a physician (Colossians 4:14), uses a word also found in medical writing of his day. Saul’s eyes were opened in more ways than one. He later wrote, **“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”** (2 Corinthians 4:6).

“And arose, and was baptized.” Here the phrase “in the name of Jesus Christ” is not used, and there is no reason not to read it in its ordinary sense of water. When Paul later retold the story, he remembered Ananias saying, **“arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord”** (Acts 22:16).

“When he had received meat, he was strengthened.” “Meat” in the King James means food of any kind. After three days of fasting, he ate.

Straightway He Preached

> **Acts 9:20** *And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*
> **Acts 9:21** *But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?*
> **Acts 9:22** *But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.*

“Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” The very synagogues whose leaders were holding letters authorizing him to arrest believers now heard him preach that Jesus is the Son of God.

“Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name?” The people could hardly believe it. The word “destroyed” (*portheō*) is the word for ravaging a city in war. Paul used the same word of himself: **“beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it”** (Galatians 1:13).

“Proving that this is very Christ.” “Proving” is *sumbibazō*, to put things together — as when joining pieces side by side. Saul took the scriptures he knew so well and laid them beside the facts of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, and showed that they fitted. “Very Christ” means the Christ, the Messiah, Himself.

Arabia, and a Basket Over the Wall

> **Acts 9:23** *And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:*
> **Acts 9:24** *But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.*
> **Acts 9:25** *Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.*

“After that many days were fulfilled.” Luke passes over a whole period here. Paul fills it in:

> **Galatians 1:15** *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace,*
> **Galatians 1:16** *To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:*
> **Galatians 1:17** *Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.*
> **Galatians 1:18** *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.*

Between his first preaching in Damascus and his first visit to Jerusalem lay **three years**. Part of that time he spent in **Arabia** — the kingdom of the Nabataean Arabs, east and south of Damascus. Scripture does not say what he did there. As this series understands it, it was a time of being taught by revelation: Paul insisted that the gospel he preached came **“by the revelation of Jesus Christ”** (Galatians 1:12), not from men.

"The Jews took counsel to kill him." The hunter had become the hunted. Paul tells us that **"the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me"** (2 Corinthians 11:32). Aretas IV was the king of the Nabataeans, whose influence reached Damascus in those years.

"Let him down by the wall in a basket." Through **"a window"** in the city wall (2 Corinthians 11:33) — houses were often built into the walls of ancient cities. The man who had entered Damascus to take prisoners left it hidden in a basket. Paul never forgot the humiliation; he listed it among the things he gloried in because they showed his weakness (2 Corinthians 11:30-33).

Afraid of Him — and Barnabas

> **Acts 9:26** *And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.*
>
> **Acts 9:27** *But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.*
>
> **Acts 9:28** *And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.*

"They were all afraid of him." Who could blame them? The last time many of them had seen Saul, he was dragging their friends to prison.

"But Barnabas took him." Barnabas — whose name, given him by the apostles, means **"The son of consolation"** (Acts 4:36), or encouragement. He did what Ananias had done in Damascus: he took the risk of believing that God had changed this man. He brought Saul to the apostles and told them the whole story. Paul says he stayed fifteen days with Peter, and saw James the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:18-19).

"Coming in and going out at Jerusalem." An idiom for moving freely among them, as one of them.

Sent to Tarsus

> **Acts 9:29** *And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.*
>
> **Acts 9:30** *Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.*

"Disputed against the Grecians." The Greek-speaking Jews — the very group that had disputed with Stephen and had him killed (Acts 6:9). Saul took up Stephen's argument, in Stephen's city, with Stephen's opponents. **"But they went about to slay him."**

Paul later told of something that happened on this visit. While he was praying in the temple, the Lord appeared to him and said, **"Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem... Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles"** (Acts 22:18, 21).

"They brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus." The brethren put him on a ship home. There, in Tarsus, he disappears from Acts for years — until Barnabas goes to find him and bring him to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).

The Churches Had Rest

> **Acts 9:31** *Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*

With the chief persecutor converted, the persecution died down. **"Walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost."** The same Greek root as Barnabas's name: *paraklēsis*, comfort, encouragement, a calling alongside. The churches were built up and multiplied.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

He is alive. The strongest proof Saul ever had that Jesus rose from the dead was Jesus Himself, alive, speaking to him from heaven. The crucified man he had hated was the risen Lord at God's right hand. His death on the cross, His resurrection, His ascension — Saul met the result of all three on the Damascus road.

Christ and His body are one. "Why persecutest thou me?" The Lord in heaven feels what is done to His people on earth.

The Son of God. The first thing Saul preached was "that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20) — and he proved it from the scriptures.

To the Grace Administration

Grace to the worst. Paul never got over it: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him" (1 Timothy 1:15-16). If God could save Saul, He can save anyone.

Not by works. Saul had all the credentials a man could have — birth, tribe, education, zeal, a blameless record under the Law. He counted them all as loss "for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). Grace does not reward our credentials. It replaces them.

The apostle of the mystery. To this man God later revealed what had been hidden from other ages: "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6). "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

Every believer is part of His body. What Saul learned in one sentence on the road became one of the great teachings of his letters: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Corinthians 12:27).

To the Topic of Welcoming the Changed

- **God can change anyone.** No one is beyond His reach.
- **Be an Ananias.** Go when God sends you, even when you are afraid. Call the new believer "brother."

- **Be a Barnabas.** Stand beside the person no one else trusts yet.
- **Changed people are still people.** Saul needed food, rest, friends and a place to go. The church gave him all of them.
- **Real change shows.** Saul preached the faith he had tried to destroy, and the churches "glorified God in me" (Galatians 1:24).

The Main Takeaway

On the road to Damascus the risen Jesus stopped the church's fiercest enemy and made him its greatest apostle — a pattern for all who would believe afterward that no one is too far gone for the grace of God, and a call to every believer to welcome the changed as brothers.

- **Sincerity is not enough.** Saul was sincere, and sincerely wrong.
- **Jesus is alive,** and He takes personally what is done to His people.
- **Stop kicking against the goads.** Fighting God hurts only ourselves.
- **God prepares both sides** — the one who needs to hear and the one who needs to go.
- **Grace is greater than any past.**
- **Suffering is not a sign that God has left you.** "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."
- **Welcome the new believer** as family.

For Our Learning — The People

- **Saul of Tarsus.** A Pharisee of the tribe of Benjamin, educated under Gamaliel, a Roman citizen; the chief persecutor of the church; called by the risen Christ on the Damascus road; known later by his Roman name, Paul.
- **The high priest.** Head of the council, who gave Saul letters to the synagogues of Damascus.
- **Saul's companions.** Men travelling with him, who saw the light and heard the sound of the voice but not its words.
- **Jesus.** The risen Lord, who appeared to Saul and spoke to him from heaven.
- **Ananias.** A devout disciple at Damascus, well spoken of by the Jews, who was sent to lay hands on Saul and called him "Brother." (Not the Ananias of Acts 5, nor the high priest Ananias of Acts 23.)
- **Judas of Straight Street.** The man in whose house Saul stayed in Damascus; nothing more is known of him.
- **The disciples at Damascus.** Who received Saul, fed him, and saved his life by letting him down the wall.
- **Aretas IV.** King of the Nabataean Arabs, whose governor in Damascus tried to arrest Saul.
- **Barnabas.** "The son of consolation," a Levite from Cyprus, who brought Saul to the apostles and later fetched him from Tarsus.
- **Peter and James.** The apostle Peter and James the Lord's brother, whom Saul met in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18-19).
- **The Grecians.** Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem who tried to kill Saul, as they had killed Stephen.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **The high priest's letters.** Letters of authority to synagogue leaders, empowering Saul to arrest members of their congregations.
- **Travel.** Damascus was about a week's journey from Jerusalem on foot or by animal.
- **Noon.** The hottest hour of the day; travellers often rested then. The light from heaven outshone the midday sun.
- **Ox goads.** Long pointed sticks used to drive oxen; "kicking against the pricks" was a Greek proverb for useless resistance.
- **Fasting.** Going without food and drink as a sign of grief, repentance or seeking God.
- **Straight Street.** The main east–west street of Damascus.
- **Laying on of hands.** A sign of blessing, healing and identification.
- **City walls.** Houses were sometimes built into or on top of city walls, with windows through them (compare Rahab, Joshua 2:15).
- **Baskets.** Large woven baskets of rope or reed, big enough to hold a man.
- **Surnames.** Men often had a second name given for their character (Barnabas) or a second name in another language (Saul and Paul).

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Epizeuxis** — the same word repeated for emphasis. "Saul, Saul" (9:4).
- **Metaphor** — speaking of one thing as another. "Breathing out threatenings and slaughter" (9:1); "a chosen vessel" (9:15); "kick against the pricks" (26:14).
- **Simile** — a comparison using "as." "There fell from his eyes as it had been scales" (9:18).
- **Erotesis** — a question asked to make a point. "Why persecutest thou me?" (9:4); "Is not this he that destroyed them…?" (9:21).
- **Idiom** — "coming in and going out" (9:28), moving freely among people; "received meat" (9:19), ate food.

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Saul was not renamed Paul at his conversion.** He carried both names; Luke begins using "Paul" at Acts 13:9.
- **Saul saw the risen Jesus** — he names himself as a witness of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:8).
- **The light came at noon**, brighter than the sun.
- **"Kick against the pricks" is genuine** — but in the Greek it belongs to Acts 26:14, not 9:5.
- **His companions heard the sound of the voice but did not understand the words.**
- **He was blind for three days** and did not eat or drink.
- **Ananias was an ordinary disciple**, not an apostle.
- **"Chosen vessel" was said to Ananias** about Saul.

- **Saul was filled with holy spirit** when Ananias laid hands on him.
- **He went to Arabia** and did not go to Jerusalem for three years (Galatians 1:17-18).
- **He escaped Damascus in a basket** through a window in the wall.
- **Barnabas vouched for him** when the disciples were afraid.

God's Will and Intent

- **God wants everyone saved** — even His fiercest enemies.
- **God stops people on the wrong road** and turns them around.
- **God takes personally what is done to His people.**
- **God chooses the unlikely**, so that no flesh can glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:29).
- **God prepares both the messenger and the hearer.**
- **God wants His family to welcome the changed.**
- **God is honest about the cost** of following Him — and faithful through it.
- **God turns enemies into apostles.**