

# Beginning to Serve

Acts 9:20-30, 11:19-30



## At Once

- ❑ Saul<sup>1</sup> became a follower of Christ after Jesus met him on the road to Damascus (*Acts 9:1-19*). Read *Acts 9:20-22*. After becoming a Christian, Saul immediately began to serve God.
  - 📖 “At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.” (*9:20, NIV*)
    - **Reflection:** If you are a Christian, are *you* serving? Perhaps you are a relatively new Christian and don’t feel ready to serve. What are you waiting for?<sup>2</sup>

## Arabia

- ❑ In his letter to the Galatians, Saul wrote, “I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus” (*Galatians 1:17*).<sup>3</sup> The Bible does not tell us *why* Saul went to Arabia. It could have been for 1) personal reflection and prayer,<sup>4</sup> 2) proclaiming the gospel,<sup>5</sup> or both.

## Attacked

- ❑ Read *Acts 9:23-30*. In Damascus, “the Jews conspired to kill [Saul]” (*9:23*) and the governor sought to arrest him (*2 Corinthians 11:32*). Saul’s old associates now opposed him.
- ❑ When Saul went to Jerusalem, the Grecian Jews tried to kill him (*Acts 9:29*).
  - When a person becomes a Christian and begins to serve, some level of opposition is expected (*2 Timothy 3:12*). The “world” (including society and government), old friends and colleagues, and even family members, may oppose the Christian.



## Accepted

- ❑ When he arrived in Jerusalem<sup>6</sup> Saul tried to join the disciples of Jesus, “but they were afraid of him, not believing that he was really a disciple” (*9:26*). However, Barnabas<sup>7</sup> took Saul to the apostles,<sup>8</sup> told them what had happened, and encouraged them to accept him.
  1. What was Barnabas’ role in this story? How can Christians be like Barnabas in their church or Christian community today?

<sup>1</sup> Saul was also called Paul (*Acts 13:9*). Saul was his Hebrew name, and Paul (*Gr. Paulos*) was his Roman name.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, Saul’s ministry was unique. But there are many ways to serve. A Christian’s particular ministry will be affected by his/her abilities, gifts, personality, passion, experiences, opportunities, time, and spiritual maturity. But each Christian should serve! Each Christian is an important part of the Body of Christ (see *1 Corinthians 12:12-31*).

<sup>3</sup> Acts does not mention Saul’s time in Arabia. Apparently, Saul left Damascus for a while and then returned. In *Acts 9:23*, the “many days” probably refer to his time in both Damascus and Arabia, which was about three years (*Galatians 1:19*). “Arabia” refers to the Nabatean kingdom east and southeast of Damascus.

<sup>4</sup> Certainly, Saul had some major rethinking to do! His meeting with Jesus was the start of a major transformation.

<sup>5</sup> Aretas (the Nabatean king) may have wanted to arrest Saul because he was preaching in Arabia (*2 Cor. 11:32*).

<sup>6</sup> Apparently, this trip to Jerusalem happened three years after Saul became a Christian, and Saul stayed with Peter for a period of fifteen days (*Galatians 1:18*).

<sup>7</sup> The name “Barnabas” means “son of encouragement” (*Acts 4:36*).

<sup>8</sup> On this occasion, “the apostles” probably included only Peter and James, the brother of Jesus (*Galatians 1:18-19*).

2. Certainly, the disciples had reason to suspect Saul. Even today, impostors may enter Christian groups to harm them or mislead them. How could the disciples know that Saul had really changed and become a genuine Christian? How can we discern between genuine Christians and impostors today?<sup>9</sup>

### At Home

- ❑ When the disciples learned that Saul's life was in danger, "they took him to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus" (*Acts 9:30*). Tarsus (in Cilicia) was Saul's birthplace and first home.
- ❑ In his letter to the Galatians, Saul said that he went to "Syria and Cilicia" (*1:21*). The Bible does not say what Saul did in Cilicia and Syria, but he probably proclaimed the gospel!
  - **Reflection:** Maybe you have become a Christian since you left home. What do *you* do when you return home? Do people see the change in your life? Do you share your faith?

### Antioch

- ❑ Read *Acts 11:19-26*.<sup>10</sup> A church in Antioch<sup>11</sup> started and grew rapidly, largely because many Gentiles (non-Jews) were becoming Christians. Barnabas was sent to investigate, and he saw evidence of *God's grace* in Antioch (*11:23*). He also realized the need for help in teaching.
  - ❑ So Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Saul back to Antioch, and "for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people" (*11:25-26, NIV*).
3. What is significant about the church in Antioch? (*11:20-21*)



### Aid

- ❑ Read *Acts 11:27-30*.<sup>12</sup> The Christians in Antioch anticipated the needs, and decided to help "the brothers living in Judea" (*11:29*). Saul and Barnabas delivered the gift to the church in Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> This act of love and care helped strengthen the bond of fellowship between the Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem and the mostly Gentile-Christian church in Antioch.
4. A rapidly growing church is a good thing! But what is needed for the church to be strong and healthy? (*11:23, 26; 29-30*) How did Saul and Barnabas help with this?

### Application

- Saul served primarily by proclaiming the gospel. Do you understand the gospel? If not, ask Jay or another Christian friend. See "The Good News" on the ICF website.
- If you are a Christian, in what specific ways are you serving God? If you are not serving, make a commitment to serve in some way. If you need guidance, ask a church leader.

<sup>9</sup> We are not to "judge" others in a negative sense, and we have limited knowledge of another person's heart. We must be humble. But the Bible instructs Christians to be discerning about false teachers and Christian impostors. This is not always easy, but their testimony and lives are indicators (see 1 John 4:1-3; 2:3-6; 3:14; Matt. 7:15-20).

<sup>10</sup> Actually, the term "Christian" is used only three times in the Bible (*Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16*). Christians preferred to be called "disciples," "saints," and "brothers."

<sup>11</sup> Antioch, the capital of the province of Syria, was the third largest city in the Empire (after Rome and Alexandria).

<sup>12</sup> Other sources mention famine conditions in various parts of the Empire. For example, Roman historian Suetonius confirms "a scarcity of grain because of long-continued droughts" (*Life of Claudius*, 18:2). Jewish historian Josephus speaks of a severe famine in Judea sometime between AD 44 and 48 (*Antiquities*, 20:51-53, 100-101).

<sup>13</sup> This visit may be the same one mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10.