

Acts 9:1-31

Aim of Lesson

To show how God chose Saul to preach the gospel, and how he responded wholeheartedly.

Background study

Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 22:3-21 and 25-28; 26:3-20. Galatians 1:11-17.

Suggested outline of lesson

Introduce the lesson with a series of questions, e.g., "Have you ever been convinced that what you were doing was right, even when others told you that you were wrong? Have you played a game with friends and thought you knew all the rules, even though your friends may have argued with you, and you felt sure you were right and insisted on playing your way? Perhaps, after all, you realized you were wrong. What then?"

Continue then with Saul's conviction that he was right to persecute the Christians. Show how he loved God and was certain that the people who believed in Jesus were wrong. He thought they were going against the laws of the God of Israel and were, therefore, worthy of death. Remind the children of the incident when Stephen was stoned to death, and Saul's part in it. Describe Saul in detail. He was highly educated, a Pharisee, a Roman citizen, and proud to be one of God's people, a Jew. Explain why he needed the letter from the high priest, and what he intended doing to the Christians at Damascus.

Tell the children that one day something happened which altered Saul's whole life and convinced him that what he had been doing with such dedication for God had been, in fact, against God's wishes. In describing the dazzling vision, convey the suddenness of the revelation, the personal impact upon Saul himself, and the confusion that prevailed amongst his companions as a result. Stress the fact that the moment Saul knew that the voice which came from heaven was that of Jesus, he had to face the shock of realizing that he had been wrong. Then Saul, who had been the authoritative leader, had to be led, shocked, blind and helpless, into the city. In describing the consequences of the vision, explain that God had made Saul blind in order that he should "see" and recognize the truth about Jesus. Ask the children to try to imagine the emotions and thoughts experienced by Saul during the period of blindness, for he could not have known at first that his sight was to be restored.

Saul was not the only one to experience a vision on that occasion. In the city of Damascus, Ananias had heard about Saul and together with the other Christians would have been filled with apprehension pending Saul's arrival. No doubt they had heard of the persecutions in Jerusalem. The information and instructions Ananias received in a vision regarding Saul's change of heart were difficult to accept, and only the authority of the words of Jesus convinced him that God had deliberately chosen Saul to carry out his purpose. When Ananias confronted Saul he found not a proud persecutor but a humbled and devout man of God, praying earnestly for forgiveness and understanding. Explain that Saul had been converted, meaning that his whole life and outlook had now been changed around. Ask the children what Saul would most want to do, now that he knew about and believed in Jesus. He would want to be baptized. Explain the significance of baptism and the way in which Saul's past wrongs were wiped away and he was able to make a completely new start; later he even changed his name. Describe the joy of having his sight restored, of being baptized, and endowed with the Holy Spirit, followed by the making of new friends and experiencing the warmth of their fellowship. Contrast this with the anger of the Pharisees who awaited Saul, and their amazement at finding him in the synagogue preaching about Jesus.

During the days that followed Saul left Damascus and went into Arabia, where the deeper truths of the gospel were revealed to him by the Lord Jesus. Returning to Damascus, he devoted himself to teaching, to the amazement of the people and the anger of the Jewish leaders. It seemed to them that he had betrayed God and that, in joining the ranks of the Christians, he also deserved to die. Using a hushed voice and suitable facial expressions, convey the tension of his escape along darkened streets, under the shadow of thick stone walls, up steep stone steps, treading softly to avoid the attention of the watchful guards, and then being lowered in a basket.

Describe how Saul fearlessly preached the Christian gospel in Jerusalem until, because of another threat to his life, he had to flee again. That which he had in the past inflicted upon others he was now in danger of receiving himself.

Relevance to the children's lives

Do you remember that, at the beginning of this story, we talked about finding out that we were completely wrong about something when we had been sure we were right? When we are shown to be wrong, how do we feel? Is it easy to admit our mistake, or are we sometimes obstinate and continue to argue? What should we do?

Worksheets

The solution to the jumbled words is 'The Jews tried to kill Saul so his friends let him out of the city in a basket'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, when we realize that we have made a mistake, help us to admit it. Teach us the way you want us to live. Amen.

Memory verse

"And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20).