

Acts 9:1-19

The Chief of Sinners

Scripture: Acts 9:1-19

Memory Verse: 1 Timothy 1:15 *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I [Saul] am chief.”*

Lesson Focus: This section tells the amazing story of Saul’s conversion. In another section of Scripture (our memory verse), Saul describes himself as the “chief of sinners”. If God can save such a villain, he can save ANYONE! Our prayer is that kids will be encouraged to pray for lost friends and family and also examine their own hearts.

Activities and Crafts: Saul’s Conversion Coloring Picture, Word Search of different terms from lesson, Bring it Home Discussion for 3rd – 5th.
Craft for 1st/2nd Grade: Handcuffs

Starter Activity: Villain Challenge

Consider getting the kids engaged with another game of “Guess Who”. We played this a few weeks ago when we covered Acts 7 with well known figures of history. This time, however, play it with several well-known villains from stories and movies that the kids are familiar with. * See several examples below and certainly feel free to add your own! Be sure to wrap up the quiz with the last one about Saul that will take us into our lesson!

- 1) I disguised myself as a grandma to trick a little girl into being my lunch. (Big Bad Wolf from “Little Red Riding Hood”)
- 2) I was so in love with a certain princess that I made up a silly piano song about her that has become famous on YouTube (Bowser from “The Mario Movie”) *
- 3) I gave a mermaid legs in exchange for her beautiful voice. (Ursula from “The Little Mermaid”)
- 4) Before I grew up and became bad, my name was Anakin. (Darth Vader from “Star Wars”) *
- 5) I kidnapped a young princess with magical hair so I could use her magical hair to stay young and beautiful. (Mother Gothel from “Tangled”)
- 6) I really don’t like hedgehogs, especially the blue ones. (Dr. Robotnik from “Sonic the Hedgehog”)
- 7) I pretended to want to marry a certain princess but I was secretly planning to seize her and her sister’s throne. (Prince Hans from “Frozen”) *
- 8) I hated Christians so much that I hunted them down going from house to house dragging them off to prison! (Saul of Tarsus from **Acts 8:3-4**)

We first learned about this Saul of Tarsus a couple of weeks ago. He was essentially the chief villain opposing the early church. As we continue in Acts, the story and “action” centers around him again. Let’s open our Bibles and see what sort of “villainry” he is up to now!

Bible Study:

Acts 9:1a: Saul appears to be just as much of a villain as he was in the last chapter! *

You might remember how he led a tidal wave of persecution that caused Christians to flee Jerusalem bringing the gospel to new places. We saw last week how Philip was one of them and he brought the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection for sinners to Samaria. I'm sure reports of this came to Saul and it made him even MORE mad! Think about how some of your favorite movie villains look during their monstrous meltdowns as they are defeated by the good guys! * That is probably what what Saul looked like!

Acts 9:1b-2: Another place that the Christians fled to was a city called Damascus just north of Jerusalem. * Saul was so determined to stop the spread of the gospel that he got permission to lead a "search and arrest" * mission for these people of "the Way".

In **John 14:6**, Jesus said that HE was the WAY, the Truth, and the Life and that no one comes to the Father except through Him! As the early believers spread the good news about Jesus, it appears that people referred to them as people of "the Way". *

Saul was instead yelling "NO WAY" as he thought Jesus was still dead. Instead he believed people had to be good, keep the Jewish law, and save themselves by their own good works! *

Acts 9:3: So, Saul packs his bags (and his "handcuffs") and marches toward Damascus with anger and hatred in his eyes. (**Teachers:** We will leave a set of play handcuffs in your class. Considering using them as a prop throughout the lesson. At this point pretend to be Saul marching out angry with the handcuffs ready in hand) *

Q: But as he was heading there, what happened?

A: A mysterious light shown around him from heaven! Whoa!

Acts 9:4: And not only was there a bright light, but there was a voice! And the voice even knew him by name! Double-Whoa!

Acts 9:5: Saul then sheepishly asks who the Person is behind the voice.

Q: Who was it? A: That's right, Jesus! The same Jesus that Saul thought was dead was actually alive and speaking from His heavenly throne!

Q: But wait, who was Saul persecuting? A: He was hunting down the believers, not Jesus. Yet Jesus says you are persecuting ME! (like a big brother might say to a bully picking on his little brother or sister) * Saul's time of saying NO to the Son of God or "kicking against the goads" is over!

Acts 9:6-9: Wow! This is quite the turn of events. Saul began this journey as the one making the orders to arrest the followers of Jesus but he finishes it blind, weak, and humbled by Jesus Himself! Instead, he is the one who has been "arrested" by Jesus! (**Teachers:** At this point invite a volunteer up to be Jesus handcuffing you to illustrate how instead of Saul capturing Christians, Jesus Himself sort of "captured" Saul!)

Acts 9:10: Meanwhile, as Saul is sort of “handcuffed” waiting for further instructions, Jesus also speaks to one of the believers in Damascus Saul would have arrested named Ananias.

Acts 9:11-12: And Jesus gives him some very clear instructions.

Q: What did Jesus want Ananias to do? A: To go and visit Saul and pray over him to restore his sight.

Acts 9:13-14: But Ananias gives Jesus some “back-talk” (not a good idea)! * He appears to be a little afraid to go!

Q: Why? A: Because he knows that Saul is the chief villain! He is the one who has been leading the persecution of the Christians. *

Acts 9:15-16: Yet Jesus is so patient and gently reassures Ananias that it is OK because this is all part of His plan to reach the world with the gospel! As we will see in continuing through the book of Acts, Saul will become the greatest missionary the church has EVER known!

Acts 9:17: While I can imagine that Ananias was a little nervous, he obeyed and did just as Jesus told him. Wouldn't you if Jesus spoke to you in this way?

Acts 9:18-19: And as Ananias prayed over him he restored his sight, got baptized, and truly became a believer in Jesus Christ! * The “handcuffs” came off! (**Teachers:** Have a volunteer come and remove the handcuffs from you) And instead of arresting the believers in Damascus he is now friends with them!

The truth is, however, that Saul had another set of handcuffs on him his whole life that also came off at this moment. In another book of the Bible he wrote these words (our memory verse): *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”* (**1 Timothy 1:15**)

He refers to himself as the CHIEF of sinners! * I suspect that when he was confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus he not only learned that Jesus was alive, but that Jesus was indeed the “ONLY WAY” by which he could be set free from his sin and guilt. He was “handcuffed” to a hopeless life of self-righteousness trying to be good enough in keeping God's law in order to earn his own way into heaven. * But he realized his works would never be enough. Only Jesus could set him free, and by faith in Jesus, he was now free! *

Key Point: Saul was the chief of sinners, the head villain against the early church. Not only was he defeated, but God transformed him into the greatest hero of the church! * If God can save Saul, he can save ANYBODY! *

Q: Are there people in your life, family members, that seem beyond hope? Pray for them and know that if God could save Saul, he could save them!

Q: Are you still handcuffed to your sin? Or maybe, like Saul, you think you have to be a good person to earn God's love? NO! Believe on Jesus, and may He set you free today!

FIND THE TREASURE



Read 1 Tim 1:15
What did Saul describe himself as?

PARENT CHALLENGE
What does it mean to "kick against the goads"?

Read Acts 9:3-5
Why did Jesus say that Saul was persecuting Him?

