

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

ROMAN EMPIRE

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Conversion of Paul (Acts 9: 1-22)

The Acts of the Apostles is the second part of Luke's connected narrative that traces the Gospel of Jesus from its roots embedded in the Hebrew scriptures to its journey to Rome at the very heart of the Gentile world. For Luke the conversion of Paul was central to this connected narrative announced so clearly by Simeon who greeted the infant Jesus in the temple with the prophetic acknowledgement: 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.' It is helpful to note that Saul and Paul are two names for the same person: one Hebrew and the other Greek.

The image to stimulate reflection on Luke's account of the conversion of Paul is *Roman Empire*.

Core extract from the Gospel (Acts 9: 21-22; for reflection throughout the week)

All who heard Paul were amazed and said,
'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem
among those who invoked the name of Jesus?
And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing
them bound before the chief priests?'
Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the
Jews who lived in Damascus
by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
you made yourself known
to Paul on the Damascus road,
and commissioned him to travel to Rome.
Inspire us by Paul's example
to share our faith in you
with those who shape our world;
for your name's sake.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Acts 9: 1-22

The Conversion of Saul

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.' So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul Preaches in Damascus

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' All who heard him were amazed and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?' Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Acts 9: 1-22)

Begin to explore how Luke describes the conversion of Paul by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- What do you make of Paul's 'experience' on the Damascus road?
- How do you interpret Paul's loss of sight?
- What do you make of Ananias' role in this account?
- What is the significance of Paul 'proving that Jesus was the Messiah'?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore Luke's purpose in writing his two books.

- Luke 1: 1-4
- Acts 1: 1-5

Explore Luke's vision of the Gospel for the Gentiles.

- Luke 2: 25-32

Explore Luke's account of Paul.

- Acts 7: 58-8: 1
- Acts 27: 11-17

Explore Paul's own account of his conversion.

- Galatians 1: 11-16a

CONVERSION OF PAUL (YEAR A) Sunday 25 January 2026

Exploring online

Widen your exploration of Luke's account of the conversion of Paul by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- Importance of Rome for Luke
- *Religio licita* in Luke
- Images of the Roman Empire

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on Paul's account of the conversion of Paul is *Roman Empire*. Draw on your experience of the Roman Empire. For example:

- Where have you seen evidence of Roman occupation in the UK?
- Have you visited the city of Rome?
- What have you seen about the Roman Empire in pictures and film?

What have you learned about the impact of the Roman Empire?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Luke's account of the conversion of Paul or by the image of the Roman Empire.

- Create a poster illustrating the conversion of Paul.
- Create a collage of images of the Roman Empire.
- Make costumes for Roman soldiers.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of the conversion of Paul on the image of the Roman Empire.



EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



The scripture quotations contained in these materials are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Anglicised Edition, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and is used with permission. All rights reserved.

Copyright © Leslie J. Francis, 2025
Canon Theologian Liverpool Cathedral
with sponsorship and support from
St Mary's Centre, Wales