

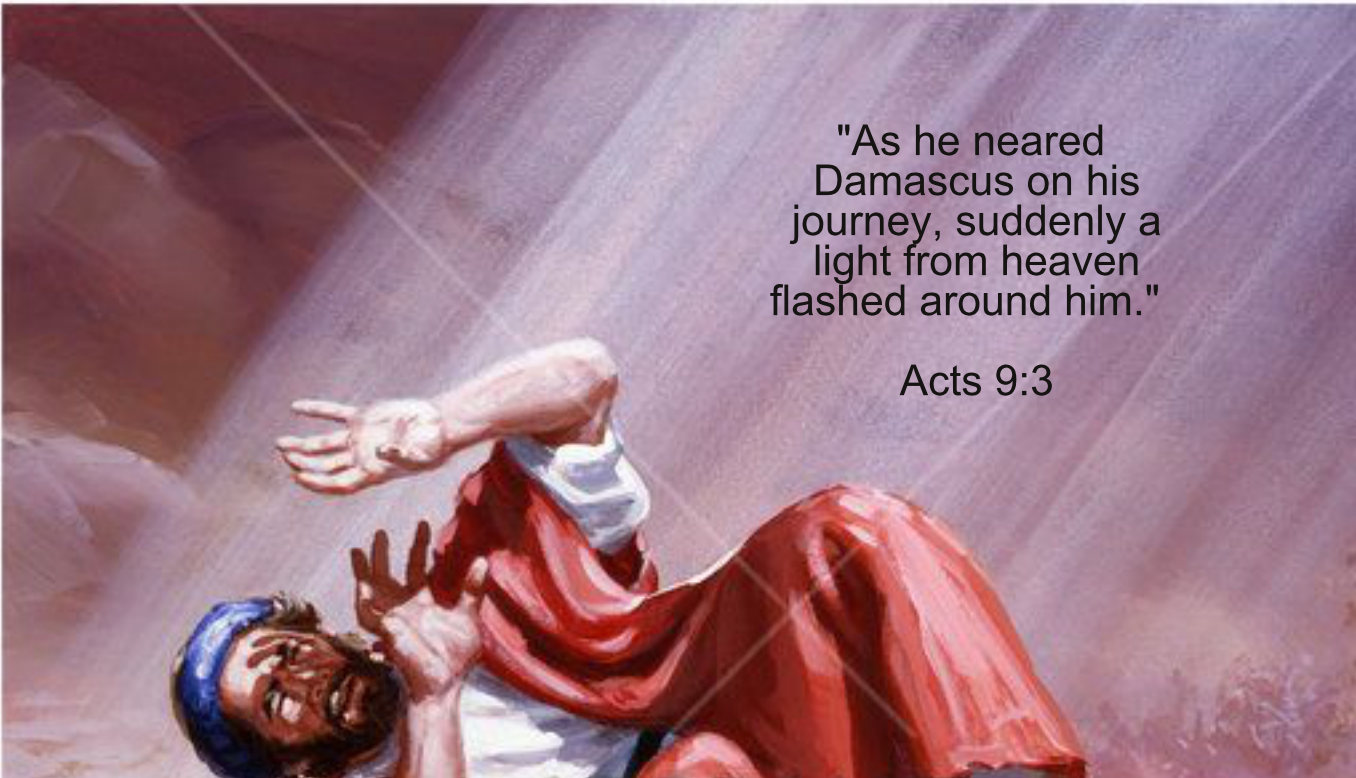


# DAMASCUS ROAD

THE CONVERSION OF PAUL

ACTS 9:1-9





"As he neared  
Damascus on his  
journey, suddenly a  
light from heaven  
flashed around him."

Acts 9:3

## DAMASCUS ROAD

BIBLE STUDY AND PUZZLES

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## ACTS 9:1-9

1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest (2) and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.



## IT BEGAN WITH STONES...

After the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), persecution of the church became widespread. Saul, who had been present at the martyrdom of Stephen, and even held the cloaks of those doing the stoning (Acts 7:58), zealously pursued those of "The Way" in order to bring them bound to Jerusalem to be tried. So zealous was Saul that he was willing to travel some 150 miles from Jerusalem to Damascus to find Christians. Saul had been in Jerusalem when Christ was crucified and resurrected, and he was determined to eliminate Christ's followers. Traveling by foot, it would have taken him about two weeks to reach his destination.



*Above: Grotto of the stoning of St. Stephen beneath the greek-orthodox Church of St. Stephanus at the foot of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem*

## THE WAY

*"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."  
(Acts 9:1-2)*

The persecution of the church had caused believers to flee throughout Judea. Some had fled as far as Damascus, and Saul was given authority from the high priest to go there and track them down.

The description of Christians as "who were of the Way" comes from Jesus Himself in John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, **I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**" The title appears several times in the book of Acts (19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22), and although it was originally meant as a term of derision used by the enemies of the church, the title was borne with pride by the followers of Jesus.

## "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Saul thought that he was serving God by going after these people "who were of the Way." He did not think that he was persecuting God. Notice how closely Jesus connects Himself to His church! If someone is persecuting one of His saints, that person is persecuting the Lord God!



### Straight Street

The main Roman road of Damascus in Saul's day was Straight Street. The Romans planned their cities with an east-west thoroughfare called a *decumanus maximus*. Straight Street was where Saul stayed at the house of Judas (Acts 9:11). It still exists today and is also known as Darb el-Mustaqim.

Acts 9:11:

*"So the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.'"*

## "It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

What did Jesus mean when He said this to Saul? A goad was a tool which had a sharp metal point on the end. They were used by farmers to prod animals and keep them moving. The ox would kick against the goad, but was actually hurting himself. Saul was stubborn, as perhaps an ox would be. He was hurting himself by his rejection of Jesus as Messiah.



## "LORD, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?"

Saul asked this question of Jesus after he had been blinded by the heavenly light. It is a GREAT question for any of us to ask! Finding out God's plan and purpose for our own lives is the surest way to happiness and contentment which we all seek. When we align ourselves with doing God's will, rather than our own, He will lead us and guide us. His ways are so much better than anything we could come up with on our own, and He has a PLAN for EVERY PERSON'S LIFE! Have you asked Him, "What do you want me to do?"



### ANANIAS

In addition to the story of Saul's conversion, we read in Acts 9 about a man named Ananias who was faithful and obedient to the Lord.

Having first received a vision from the Lord to seek out Saul, Ananias did as the Lord told him, even though he was fully aware of Saul's persecution of the church.

Since Ananias was one of the leaders of the church at Damascus, he would have been a prime target for Saul's persecution campaign; nevertheless, he was faithful to his calling:

### ACTS 9:17

*"Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"*

We don't know much about Ananias, but Paul later describes him in Acts 22:11 this way: *"Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.'"* Notice how Ananias immediately accepted Paul as a brother in Christ, in spite of Saul's reputation and past behavior. What a great example for us all!

### ACTS 9:19-22

*"Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?' 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah."*

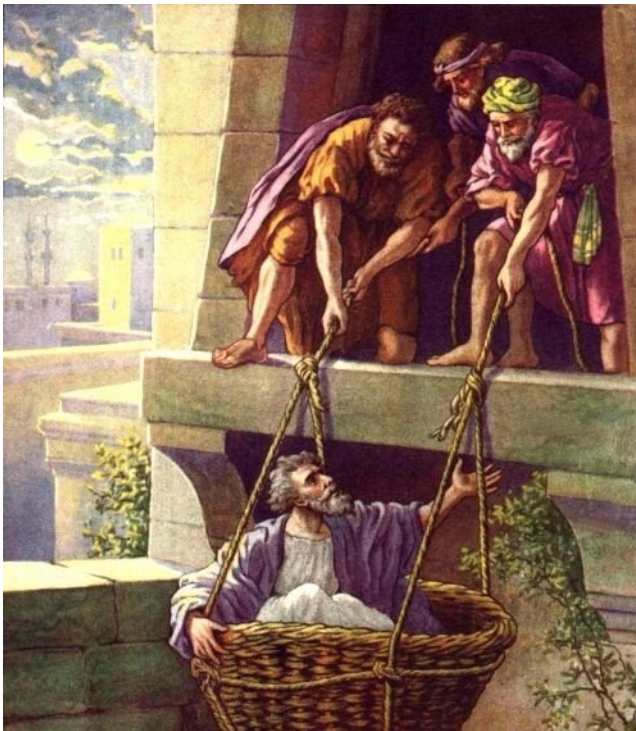
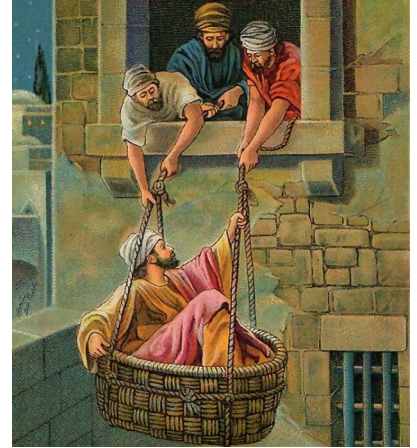
God uses unlikely people; doesn't He? And isn't it wonderful and glorious that He does! Even the Sauls of the world, when confronted by the light from heaven, JESUS, can turn from being angry and hostile towards God into blessed saints, vessels for His plans and purposes! If you know a Saul, keep praying for them - tomorrow may be their Damascus Road moment!

## BASKET CASE

Saul's conversion had an effect on him, as we read in Acts 9:20-21: *"At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, 'Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?'"*

Saul had been the enemy of the believers, yet here he was telling everyone about the good news of Christ! How could this be? The temple leaders and Jews noticed, as well, though...and they were not too happy about it (Acts 9:23-25):

*"After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall."*



This type of basket is called a *spyris*. This is an unusual use of a basket found in the Bible, and it brings new meaning to Deut. 28:5, "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl!"

The same word for baskets is used in Mark 8:8-9, when the disciples picked up the leftovers from the Feeding of the Four Thousand. It is a much larger basket than the *kophinos* (small basket or lunch box) which was used after the Feeding of the Five Thousand.



Paul tells us a little more about this incident in II Corinthians 11:32-33: *"In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands."*

Aretas IV was the Nabatean king who reigned from 9 B.C. to A.D. 40.





## BLINDED BY THE LIGHT

It shone all around him, brighter than the noon day sun. This light from heaven blinded Saul so that he could not see physically, but it began Saul's spiritual sight as to who Jesus is. The scales fell from his eyes! Scales can also mean the covering of fish (Lev. 11:9-12), but a more in-depth reference can be found in Job 14:15, in which the scales of Leviathan are described as impenetrable in a reference to pride. So both the scales of Paul's spiritual blindness and the scales of his pride are dealt with in one dramatic meeting with Jesus!

"I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.  
HE WHO FOLLOWS ME SHALL NOT  
WALK IN DARKNESS, BUT HAVE THE  
LIGHT OF LIFE."

JOHN 8:12



There are many Biblical references about light as a synonym for a personal relationship with Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. **Jesus is the light of the world**, and when we accept Him as our Lord and Savior, we can be filled with His glorious light, which shines out to everyone we meet! Here are a few verses about light:

John 1:4 - "In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind."

1 John 1:5 - "This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all."

Matthew 5:14 - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."

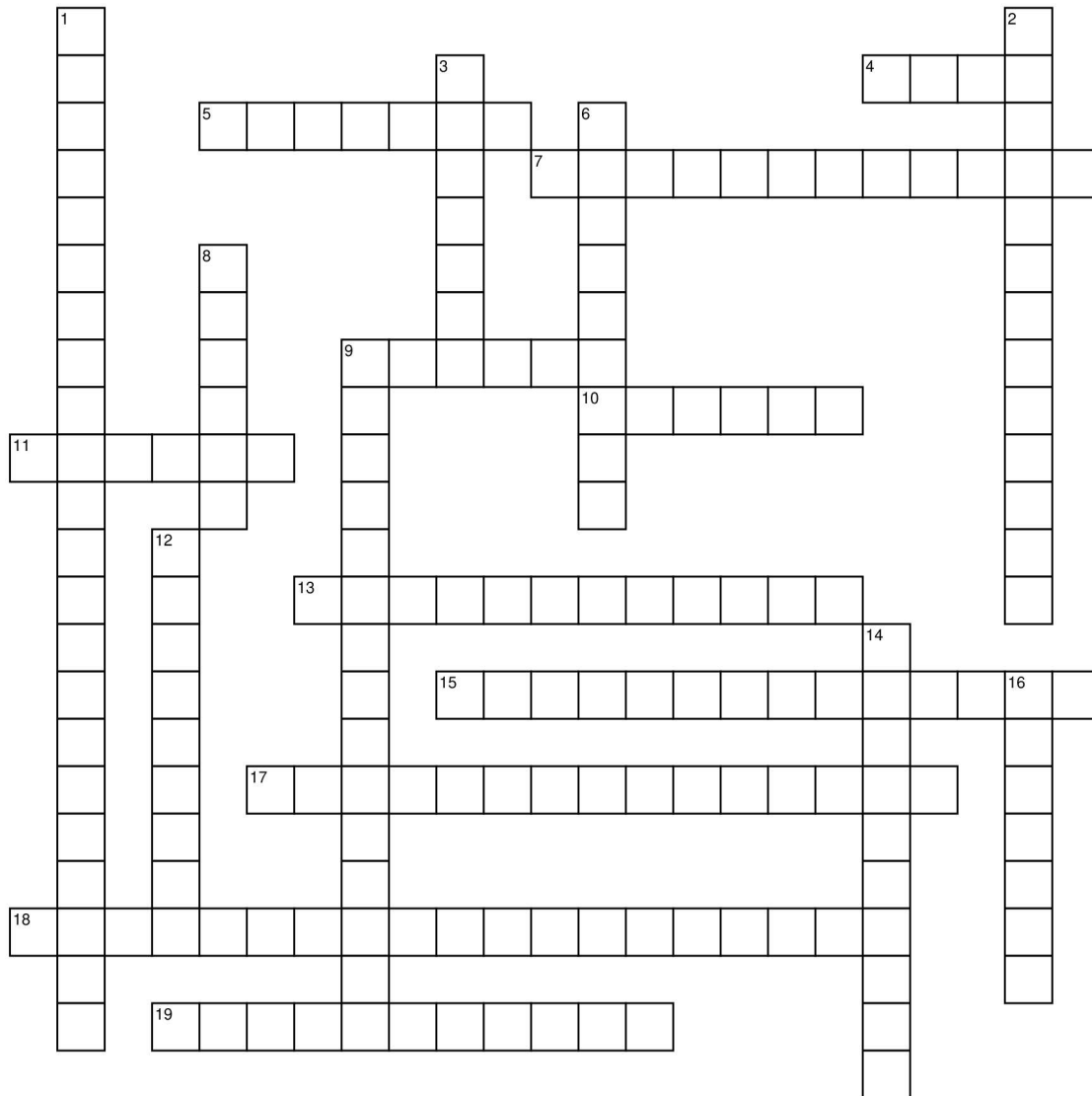
2 Corinthians 4:6 - "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."

Philippians 2:15 - "so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world."

1 Thessalonians 5:5 - "You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."

1 John 1:7 - "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin."

# DAMASCUS ROAD



From "The Bible Puzzle Book A to Z Edition" by Mary Welsh

## ACROSS

- 4 Saul's new name
- 5 What the men saw who were with Saul
- 7 Saul had authority from them to bind the disciples (2 wds)
- 9 What Saul did during his time of blindness
- 10 What Saul heard (2 wds)
- 11 Saul escaped in it
- 13 Saul was staying here (3 wds)
- 15 Saul was looking for them (4 wds)
- 17 It shone all around Saul (3 wds)
- 18 What the voice said to Saul (5 wds)
- 19 Saul began preaching this way

## DOWN

- 1 Saul's reaction when he heard the Lord speak (3 wds)
- 2 There was one, once Saul started preaching about Jesus (4 wds)
- 3 He baptized Saul
- 6 Length of time Saul was without sight (2 wds)
- 8 They fell from Saul's eyes
- 9 What Saul did when the light from heaven was around him (4 wds)
- 12 Saul's companions took him into Damascus this way (3 wds)
- 14 Saul did this to disciples of the Lord
- 16 How Ananias learned about Saul (2 wds)

# DAMASCUS ROAD

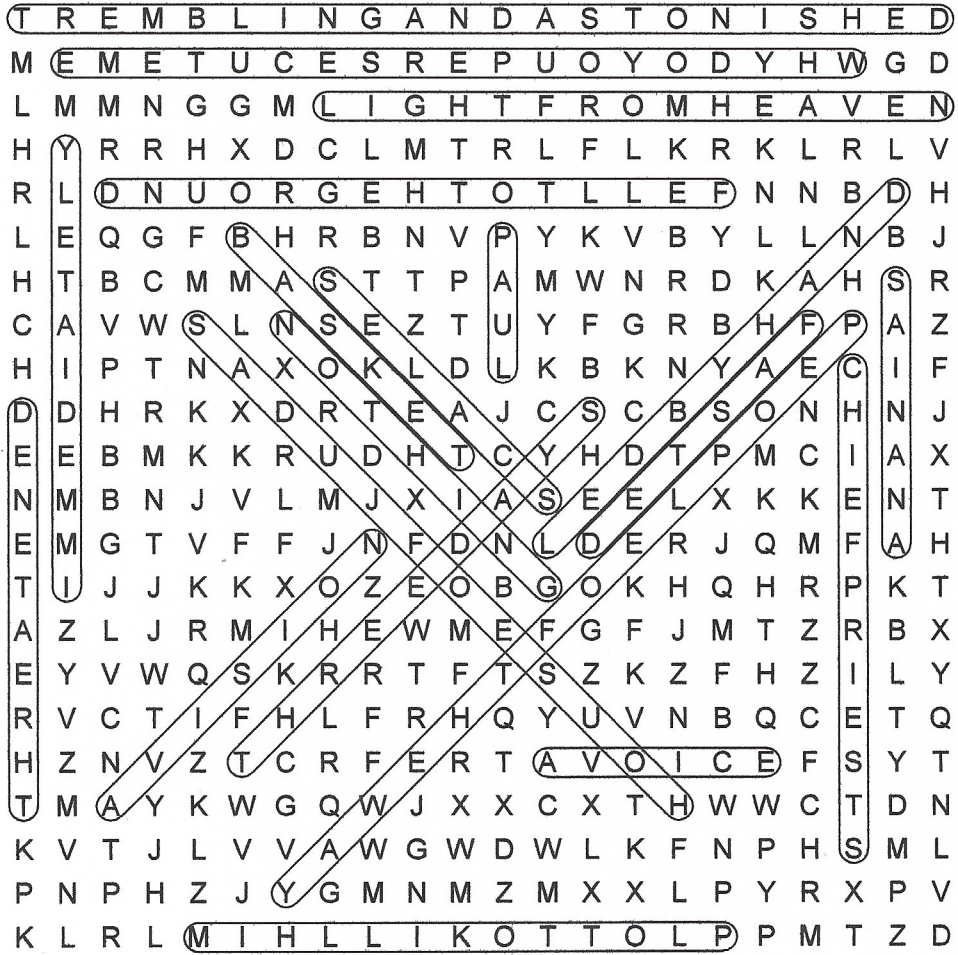
Find the words in the grid. Words can go horizontally, vertically and diagonally in all eight directions.

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L M M N G G M L I G H T F R O M H E A V E N  
H Y R R H X D C L M T R L F L K R K L R L V  
R L D N U O R G E H T O T L L E F N N B D H  
L E Q G F B H R B N V P Y K V B Y L L N B J  
H T B C M M A S T T P A M W N R D K A H S R  
C A V W S L N S E Z T U Y F G R B H F P A Z  
H I P T N A X O K L D L K B K N Y A E C I F  
D D H R K X D R T E A J C S C B S O N H N J  
E E B M K K R U D H T C Y H D T P M C I A X  
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K V T J L V V A W G W D W L K F N P H S M L  
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- |                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| ANANIAS            | LIGHT FROM HEAVEN        |
| A VISION           | NOTHING                  |
| A VOICE            | PAUL                     |
| BASKET             | PEOPLE OF THE WAY        |
| CHIEF PRIESTS      | PLOT TO KILL HIM         |
| FASTED             | SCALES                   |
| FELL TO THE GROUND | THREATENED               |
| HOUSE OF JUDAS     | THREE DAYS               |
| IMMEDIATELY        | TREMBLING AND ASTONISHED |
| LED BY HAND        | WHY DO YOU PERSECUTE ME  |



# DAMASCUS ROAD



## IMAGE INDEX

PAGE 4: Michelangelo, "The Conversion of Paul." (1542-1545)  
Cappella Paolina, Vatican Palace, Vatican City

PAGE 5: PLACE OF THE STONING OF STEPHEN - Zeromancer44, CC BY-SA 3.0  
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PAGE 6 (Top photo): STRAIGHT STREET IN DAMASCUS, c. 1900 - By Detroit Photographic Company - Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-02669 (digital file from original), uncompressed archival TIFF version (29 MiB), color level (pick white point), cropped, and converted to JPEG (quality level 88) with the GIMP 2.6.6., Public Domain,  
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PAGE 6 (Bottom photo): Jenö Remsey, "Saul on the Road to Damascus."

PAGE 7: Paul Benjamin West, "Ananias Praying for Paul." (1786)

PAGE 9 (Top photo): Greg Olsen, "Light of the World."

PAGE 9 (Bottom photo): Nathan Greene, "Light of the World."

PAGE 10: Gustave Doré, "Conversion of Saul." (1832-1883)

