

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL OF TARSUS

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 9:1-31; Galatians 1:11-19

LESSON 301 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

BIBLE TEXT in King James

Version

Acts 9:1-31

¹ And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

² And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

³ And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

⁴ And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

⁵ And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

⁶ And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

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

⁸ And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus.

⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

¹⁰ And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I *am here*, Lord.

¹¹ And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

¹² And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting *his* hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

¹³ Then Ananias answered, Lord, I

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Damascus

In this lesson we read about a band of men who were travelling in the land of Syria. They were going to Damascus, which is considered to be one of the oldest and most important cities of Syria. It is mentioned in Genesis, the first Book of the Bible (Genesis 14:15). It was located about 120 miles north of Jerusalem. It has been said that Damascus was a beautiful city with Abana, the river of sparkling, clear waters, flowing through it. In that city lived some of Christ's disciples. To that beautiful city of Damascus this band of men was travelling.

Saul

Who was among the group of men? One man was named Saul. We heard about him when we studied the stoning of Stephen, one of Jesus' disciples (Lesson 289). Saul stood near by, watching the false witnesses kill Stephen (Acts 6:3; 7:58). No doubt Saul saw the shining face of Stephen and heard Stephen's prayer for his murderers (Acts 6:15; 7:60).

Saul was a well-educated young man, having studied the Law under Gamaliel, one of the great Jewish teachers. In his way, Saul was very religious and "zealous toward God" (Acts 22:3). He was a Pharisee, and lived a very strict life according to the Jews (Acts 26:5). The Pharisees put great stress on observing ceremonies but they omitted judgment, mercy, faith, and the love of God (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). They were proud and self-righteous. Jesus said of the Pharisees, "All their works they do for to be seen of men" (Matthew 23:5). In seven different verses of the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, Jesus said that the Pharisees were "hypocrites."

From Saul's life we learn that people can be very earnest in what they believe and in what they do and yet be disobedient to Jesus. In order to please the Lord, we must believe the Bible, and obey His commandments.

Persecutor

Saul was like many of the other Jews who did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. The Apostle John spoke of Jesus, saying: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:11, 12).

Saul thought that Jesus had no right to claim to be the Son of God and the Messiah. Saul not only doubted Jesus but also hated Him. Saul said, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). This was the young man, Saul, who was travelling to Damascus.

Letters of Authority

Why was Saul going to the city of Damascus? He was on his way to persecute the followers of Jesus. Saul hated Christ and His followers. Saul caused many of Jesus' disciples to be imprisoned and put to death (Acts 26:10). Saul "made havoc of the church" by causing the disciples to be punished and persecuted (Acts 8:3). Saul thought that he was doing the right thing for God. He did not realize that Jesus was God's Son, and that God sent Jesus to this world for us.

Saul still persecuted the disciples with threatenings and death, even after he had witnessed the stoning of Stephen when Stephen

have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

¹⁴ And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

¹⁵ But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

¹⁶ For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

¹⁷ And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

¹⁹ And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

²⁰ And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

²¹ But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

²² But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

²³ And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

²⁴ But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

²⁵ Then the disciples took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket.

²⁶ And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

²⁷ But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and

had had a beautiful vision of Jesus and had said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). Saul had gone to the high priest for permission to persecute Jesus' followers in Damascus (Acts 22:5). In his possession were letters permitting him to arrest any disciple of Jesus – man or woman. Saul had planned to bind them like criminals and take them to Jerusalem.

A Light and a Voice

As Saul and the other men drew near to Damascus, something happened. Suddenly there was a great light from Heaven, "above the brightness of the sun." Saul fell to the earth and heard his name called. A Voice said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" When Saul asked who was speaking, the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

There, before the Lord, Saul must have realized that what he did against the Lord's people was really done against the Lord. When Saul persecuted the disciples, he was really persecuting Jesus. Saul must have realized that "ignorantly in unbelief" he was an enemy of the Lord (I Timothy 1:13).

Against Jesus

Today, the way God's people are treated is really the way God is treated. When someone does a good deed for the Lord's people or speaks a kind word for them, it really is done unto the Lord. If someone speaks harshly against the Lord's people or mistreats them, it is considered as spoken and as done against the Lord Himself. Jesus taught about the time when the righteous and the unrighteous will be separated. The righteous will receive a reward for the things they have done — being helpful, giving sympathy, visiting the sick, and having compassion on others. They will hear these words: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). The unrighteous will be punished because of their deeds — acting selfishly, neglecting the needy, withholding mercy, and being unkind. They will be surprised to learn that they treated Jesus that way. They will hear these words: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" (Matthew 25:45).

Instruction

No doubt Saul's conscience had pricked him many times. This time he admitted that he was doing wrong. When Jesus was revealed unto him, Saul humbled himself. He was astonished, and trembled, but he surrendered himself to the Lord and was willing to do as Jesus commanded. Saul said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord gave him specific directions, just as He plainly answers those who inquire of Him today. Saul was told to go to Damascus and await further instructions.

The men with Saul were speechless when they heard the Voice and saw no man. Apparently these other men could hear the Voice but not the words that were spoken. The words were Jesus' message to Saul.

When Saul arose to obey Jesus, he could not see "for the glory of that light" (Acts 22:11). Saul entered the city of Damascus in a different manner from what he had expected. Instead of going boldly in pursuit of the disciples, it was necessary for Saul to be led by the hand. For three days he was without sight. He did not eat or drink. He prayed, no doubt, in a different manner from the way he prayed as a Pharisee.

Ananias

In Damascus was a disciple by the name of Ananias. The Lord talked to him about Saul. Ananias had heard how Saul was persecuting the Lord's disciples. He told the Lord that Saul was coming to Damascus for that purpose. The Lord quieted the fears of Ananias and told him to help Saul. Ananias was obedient. He went

declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

²⁸ And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

²⁹ And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

³⁰ Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

³¹ Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

Galatians 1:11-19

¹¹ But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

¹² For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

¹³ For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

¹⁴ And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called *me* by his grace,

¹⁶ To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

¹⁷ Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

¹⁹ But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

to a street called Straight, to the house of Judas. There Ananias found Saul, just as the Lord had said.

Brother Saul

The Lord had shown Ananias that Saul was a "chosen vessel," that Saul would preach the Gospel, and would witness of Christ to many people. As he was commanded, Ananias placed his hands on Saul for healing, following the example of Jesus when He was on earth (Mark 6:5; 7:32; Luke 4:40, and just as Jesus had said that those who believed in Him would do. "These signs shall follow them that believe; . . . they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17, 18). (See Lesson 252.) Saul received his sight. "There fell from his eyes as it had been scales."

Ananias said, "Brother Saul" — because God had changed Saul's heart. No longer did Saul fight against Jesus. Saul called upon the name of the Lord; he obeyed the voice of Jesus; he prayed; his actions showed that he was saved. This was an example of the great mercy of the Lord — Saul was forgiven. He no longer threatened the disciples — he was one of them. He who had persecuted them was now loved by them. He was called a brother, as Jesus' followers today are referred to as brothers and sisters.

A Witness

Saul stayed with the disciples for some time. In the synagogues he preached that Jesus was the Son of God. Those who heard him were amazed at the change in Saul. When people are saved today, they are changed, too. They love Jesus and His people. They like to be with the Lord's people. They like to go to church. One who is saved wants to tell others about Jesus, just as Saul continued "witnessing both to small and great" (Acts 26:22). Have you been saved? Do you know that you can pray and ask Jesus to save you? In the Bible we read, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13).

It was three years before Saul returned to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18). Some of the Jews did not like Saul and his preaching. They decided to kill him, but he escaped from them with the help of the disciples. One night the disciples lowered Saul in a basket over the outside wall of the city. Then he went to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples were afraid of him because they remembered that he had sought their lives, but Barnabas befriended him and told the disciples about his conversion. Now he enjoyed their fellowship. Saul did not associate with his old friends among the chief priests and Pharisees — he loved to be with God's people. Wherever he went, Saul preached about Jesus. The Lord was with him, and Saul became a great preacher and missionary.

QUESTIONS

1. To what city was Saul travelling?
2. Why was Saul going there?
3. Why did Saul think he was working for God?
4. Who appeared to Saul as he was travelling?
5. How bright was the light from Heaven?
6. How did Saul regain his sight?
7. How do we know that Saul was saved?
8. After his conversion, what did Saul do for Jesus?
9. Saul's name was changed to what?
10. How did the disciples help Saul to escape from the Jews who wanted to kill him?