

THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

INTRODUCTION

- A. Paul's hatred for Christianity was based on doctrinal issues.
 - 1. Jewish tradition stressed the need for national purity so messianic blessing would come.
 - 2. Christian beliefs undermined the Saul's Pharisaic position of written and oral law.
- B. The murder of Stephen started the persecution of the church.
 - 1. Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.
 - 2. The apostles remained in Jerusalem.
 - 3. Paul became a leader of the persecution of Christians.
- C. J. Vernon McGee, *The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch was in a chariot; the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was down in the dust.*

SAUL'S CONVERSION, ACTS 9:1-19a

- A. Paul's journey to Damascus (1-9)
 - 1. Saul was increasing his persecution of Christians (1-2), ***But 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 belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.***
 - a. *still breathing threats and murder*
 - 1) *still* looks back to Acts 8:3, *But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.*
 - 2) Acts 22:4, *I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,*
 - 3) Acts 26:10, *And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.*
 - b. Saul requested letters authorizing him to bring Christians back from Damascus to Jerusalem.
 - 1) Damascus is 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem.
 - 2) The High Priest was Caiphas who wanted to punish Christians who had fled from Jerusalem.
 - 3) He had the right to extradition either from the Romans or King Aretas IV who controlled Damascus and hated the Romans.
 - c. *The Way*
 - 1) This was one of the earliest designations of Christianity and it appears only in Acts.
 - 2) It meant the path characterized by life and salvation.
 - 3) It goes back to Jesus' teaching that He is the way (John 14:6), *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (Probably, the most despised verse in the Bible).
 - 2. He was met by the risen Lord Jesus on the way (3-9)
 - a. Saul fell to the ground when he was surrounded by a light from heaven (3-4), ***Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"***
 - 1) Pharisees believed that a voice from heaven was that of God giving a rebuke or instruction.
 - 2) The voice asked Saul why he was persecuting Him.
 - 3) Saul probably wondered why the voice asked such a question since Saul thought he was doing God's will.
 - 4) Saul thought he was protecting God's truth. God does not need our protection. He wants our obedience.
 - b. Saul was told by Jesus to rise and go to Damascus (5-6), ***And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."***
 - 1) *Who are you, Lord?*
 - a) *Lord* may mean *sir*, or *master*.
 - b) It appears that Saul considered the one speaking to him was God but not Jesus.

- 2) When a person persecutes a Christian, he is persecuting Jesus. Jesus is the head of the Church.
 - 3) The words, *It is hard for you to kick against the goads*, are not in the earlier Greek manuscripts of these verse.
 - a) This statement is found in Acts 26:14.
 - b) Goads were sharp sticks used to drive cattle.
 - c) The phrase emphasizes the futility of opposing the inevitable.
 - d) A. T. Robertson, *What if it should turn out after all that Stephen was right, that Jesus was really the Messiah, that all these disciples whom he had destroyed, men and women, were pious people? The faces of some of them were strangely ecstatic as they died! And why did they die so cheerfully? How could heretics have any consolation in the hour of death?*
 - e) Some believe Saul was struggling with the law that does not justify but only condemns.
 - f) The purpose of the law is to condemn but the purpose of grace is to justify.
 - 4) *But*, despite Saul's persecution of Jesus, He had a ministry for Saul. One's past does not have to determine one's future.
- c. Saul's traveling companions took him to Damascus (7-9), *The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*
- 1) The travelers with Saul heard the sound of Jesus' voice but did not understand what He said to Saul, Acts 22:9, *Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.*
 - 2) They all fell to the ground because of the overwhelming light
 - a) Acts 26:14, *And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'*
 - b) Acts 22:11, *And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.*
 - c) It is possible that Paul's *thorn in the flesh* was eye-trouble which could have begun at the revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus, 2 Corinthians 12:7, *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.*
 - c) This reminds me of John 18:3-6, where Jesus declared to soldiers, *I am.*
 - 3) *so they led me by the hand*, William Barclay, *He who had intended to enter Damascus like an avenging fury was led by the hand into that city, blind and helpless as a child.*
 - 4) *And for three days*
 - a) It was a time of waiting for what Jesus was to tell him.
 - b) He was in darkness while he prayed and fasted.

B. Ananias' visit with Saul (10-19a)

1. The Lord commanded Ananias to go to Saul (10-12), *Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, 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."*
 - a. Ananias, a follower of Christ, received a vision and knew it was the Lord.
 - b. His vision coincided with Saul's which confirmed that it was the will of Jesus that they meet. It was similar to the vision given Cornelius and Peter concerning God's appointment for them to meet.
 - c. Ananias was directed by the Lord to lay his hands on Saul so he would regain his sight.
 - d. The first person Saul would see after regaining his sight would be a person he had come to persecute.
 - e. Sometimes those whom we perceive as enemies are actually our friends.

2. Ananias questioned the wisdom of ministering to Saul (13-14), ***But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.”***
 - a. Ananias had heard of Saul’s persecution of the *saints*.
 - 1) This is the first time Christians are called saints which means *set-apart ones*, Romans 1:1, *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*
 - 2) He knew that Saul had authority to arrest all who call on the name of Jesus in Damascus.
 - 3) Ananias would find that his concerns were of no concern to the Lord, Robert Tannehill, *Humans calculate the future on the basis of their normal experience. These calculations leave them unprepared for the appearance of the Overruler, who negates human plans and works the unexpected.*
 - 4) We can get into situations that demands the work of the Overruler, God, Who is not bound by our weaknesses or faulty conclusions.
 - b. *all who call on Your name.*
 - 1) Ananias knew the person speaking to him was Jesus.
 - 2) His doubts concerning Saul were overcome as he obeyed the Lord’s command.
 - 3) Maybe we need less information from God and more obedience from us.
3. The Lord commanded Ananias to do what he was told (15-16), ***But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”***
 - a. Jesus commanded Ananias to do what he was told, *go*.
 - b. Jesus even gave him the reason why it was such an important task - Saul was chosen to carry the name of Jesus to people, great and small.
 - 1) To Gentiles, Ephesians 3:8, *To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,*
 - 2) To Emperor Nero, Acts 25:11, *If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.”*
 - 3) To Jews, Acts 17:17, *So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.*
 - c. It was revealed to Saul the suffering he would endure for the name of Christ.
 - 1) *I, Jesus would show Saul how he must suffer. That would not be the responsibility of Ananias.*
 - 2) 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, *Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.*
 - d. Saul was well-prepared for his new ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles.
 - 1) He was familiar with Greek culture and philosophy.
 - 2) He possessed the privileges of Roman citizenship.
 - 3) He was skilled in Jewish theology.
 - 4) He had a trade that allowed him to support himself.
 - 5) He had theological insight and leadership qualities tied to great fervor.
 - e. God prepares people for the tasks He calls them to do.
 - f. Could present difficulties be preparation for a task worth living for, a task worth dying for?

4. Ananias obeyed the Lord and went to Saul (17-19a), *So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came 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 he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.*
- a. *Brother Saul*, Ananias went from fear to fellowship with Saul based on the Lord's command.
 - b. Ananias spoke words of encouragement to Saul, Acts 22:14-15, *And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.*
 - c. Ananias announced Saul's commission but Saul was commissioned by Jesus.
 - d. Saul received not only physical sight but spiritual sight, as well.
 - 1) He was converted/baptized in the Spirit on the road to Damascus.
 - 2) He was filled by the Spirit as he responded to God's Word through Ananias.
 - 3) He was baptized by water, identifying with the risen Christ.
 - e. He was strengthened with physical food.
 - f. God provides what we need to be faithful and useful in His service.

CONCLUSION

- A. Saul headed to Damascus with personal plans but Jesus gave him new ones.
- B. He was going to destroy Christians but he was transformed by Christ into a Christian.
- C. He left Jerusalem as Saul the persecutor but left Damascus as Paul the Apostle.
- D. William Neil, *It was as is every genuine conversion experience, a miracle of the grace of God.*