

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Introduction:

1. His conversion is related in:
 - a. Acts 9:1-22 -- as it happens chronologically.
 - b. Acts 22 -- Paul relates it to Jews in Jerusalem
 - c. Acts 26 -- Paul relates it to King Agrippa
2. Foy E. Wallace preached on the life of Paul in 4 parts.
 - a. Paul A Persistent Persecutor
 - b. Paul A Praying Penitent
 - c. Paul A Powerful Preacher
 - d. Paul A Patient Prisoner
3. Every Christians needs to be familiar with the conversions in the book of Acts.
 - a. They tell us how one becomes a Christian today.
4. Saul of Tarsus became perhaps the greatest preacher who ever lived on earth outside our Lord and Savior Jesus Himself.

BODY.

1. Saul is first mentioned in Acts 7:58 where he held the coats of the people who were stoning Stephen to death.
 - a. Saul was born in Tarsus and grew up there.
 - b. His father was a Roman citizen and Paul had unusual advantages as he grew up.
 - c. Most of the people in Saul's day and in Saul's city were slaves.
 - d. Saul, however, had opportunity to go to school, not only in Tarsus but also in Jerusalem.
 - i. He graduated from the school conducted by Gamaliel.
 - ii. Saul was a lawyer; he was a very intelligent and educated man.
 - e. He was also a Pharisee.
 - i. The Pharisees formed the leading denomination of the Jewish people.
 - ii. The Pharisees taught many good things.
 - (1) They believed that every man has a soul and that when he died that spirit goes home to be with the Lord.
 - (2) The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead.
 - (3) The Phariesees believed in the judgment day and that good people would go to Heaven and wicked people would go to Hell.

- iii. So, you can make a long list of good things about the Pharisees
 - iv. However, you can also make quite a list of the bad things about them.
 - v. They believed they were the only ones going to heaven. They became proud and haughty, and thought they were better than everyone else. They may have been that, but they had a poor way of showing it.
 - vi. They persecuted anyone who would not be a Pharisee, and who would change their traditional ways. So
- f. Paul was a persistent persecutor of Christians.
- i. The Bible says he made havoc of the church.
 - ii. When the members of the church were scattered abroad, they went everywhere preaching the Word, and Saul went everywhere trying to stop them.
 - iii. He went up to Jerusalem and got letters from the chief men of the Sanhedrin court in Jerusalem, authorizing him to go all the way to Damascus to find Christians there, arrest them, beat them, and bring them back to Jerusalem to be tried.
 - iv. [Josephus tells us that an arrangement existed between the Jews and the Nabatean rulers of Syria for mutual extradition of nationals who were on the "wanted" list by their government back home.
2. Most everyone is quite familiar with the story of the appearance of Jesus to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus highway as it is given here in Acts 9.
- a. What I want to do here is to study the story of Saul of Tarsus by first asking what did Jesus to do him or for him;
 - b. second, asking what did the preacher do;
 - c. and third, asking what did the sinner do. That will cover the life of the apostle Paul in the manner that I have in mind today.

FIRST: WHAT DID JESUS DO?

3. FIRST of all, Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus in person, on the Damascus highway. The Lord looked down upon Saul, and His very countenance made a great light that knocked Saul down in the highway.
- a. It is commonly said that it knocked him off his horse, but I do not know whether it did

or knot. The Bible does not say anything about a horse, and I do not know whether he was walking or riding a horse.

- b. Anyway, this great light struck him down in the highway and he looked up to Heaven and saw the Lord Jesus Christ face to face.
 - c. Now you think about that. He was persecuting the church telling everyone that Jesus Christ was a fake who did not rise from the dead,, and he was making havoc with the church.
 - d. Here, this light was so bright he was knocked down on the highway; he looked up to Heaven and saw Jesus face to face in Heaven. He said, "Who art thou, Lord?"
 - e. He answered, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."
4. Saul had been goading Christians like people goading oxen with a goad. They would punch them and so the KJV says, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."
- a. Some think Saul's conscience had began troubling him. He had seen Stephen die and he had persecuted other Christians, and he had seen how they suffered for the Lord.
 - b. So Saul of Tarsus knew that he was speaking to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord told him, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."
 - c. Then Saul said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord said, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do."
 - d. So Saul arose, blinded by the great light that he had seen, and, led by the people who were with him, he arrived in Damascus.
5. Now that was all that the Lord did for Saul of Tarsus, so I raise the question, why did Jesus appear in person to Saul?
- a. There are two reasons. He appeared to him first to make him an apostle. Acts 26:16-18 tells us that to be an apostle one had to be a witness of the Lord's resurrection.
 - b. He had to see the Lord after He arose from the dead so he could bear such testimony first hand to the people.
 - i. Saul had not see the Lord after His resurrection from the dead, so the Lord showed himself to Saul to make him a witness that Jesus was alive in Heaven.
 - ii. To be an apostle one had to see the risen Christ (Luke 1:2; 2 Peter 1:16).
6. Saul was a chosen vessel to the Lord. Acts 9:15 says, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear

my name before the Gentiles."

- a. In 1 Corinthians 15:8, Paul said, "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."
 - b. The other apostles became apostle in due time. They saw the Lord here on earth after His resurrection, but Saul did not see the Lord between His resurrection and ascension.
 - c. He could not be an apostle unless he saw the proof of Jesus' resurrection, and so the Lord showed himself to Saul on the Damascus highway.
7. Then the Lord told him to go to Damascus and he would find out what to do.
- a. The Lord did not appear to ?Saul of Tarsus to save him. He did not appear to tell him what to do to be saved.
 - b. He did not appear to him to pardon him, but to qualify him to be a witness, and to make him an apostle.
 - c. He appeared to him to tell him where to go learn the gospel.
 - d. Do not let anyone tell you that the Lord appeared to Saul on the highway and saved him.
 - i. He did not do it.
 - e. He appeared to him on the highway and told him to go to Damascus and there "it shall be told thee what thou must do."
 - f. Somebody would preach the gospel to him there in Damascus, and tell him what to do in order to have his sins washed away.
8. Saul of Tarsus went to Damascus and for three days and nights he was praying, waiting for someone to come and tell him what to do.
- a. Well, again the Lord entered the picture. The Lord spoke not to Saul, but to Ananias, a gospel preacher.
 - b. He said, "Ananias, Saul of Tarsus is over here, and I want you to go preach to him."
 - c. Ananias said, "Oh no Lord, I have heard the way he persecutes Christians, and I do not want to go."
 - d. The Lord said, "Go thy way, for behold he prayeth." He changed his tune. He was not persecuting anyone but was over there praying and waiting for someone to come and tell him what to do to be saved.

9. So that answers the question, "What did the Lord do?" He appeared to Saul to make him a witness and to tell him to go to Damascus, and He appeared to the preacher to tell him to go preach the gospel to Saul of Tarsus.

II. WHAT DID THE PREACHER DO?

10. That raises the next question: What did the preacher do?
- a. He went to the house of Judas and there he found Saul of Tarsus praying, crying, and waiting for someone to come.
 - b. He had been in that condition for three days. In Acts 22:14-16, Ananias told Saul of Tarsus what to do.
 - c. Now, he did not tell him to believe in Christ. That would have been unnecessary, as he had now seen the Lord face to face.
 - d. He did not tell Saul to repent.
 - i. In the first place, Saul was already a religious man;
 - ii. in the next place, he has been showing evidence of penitence for three days not, just waiting for someone to come and tell him what to do.
11. So the preacher and the sinner were brought together.
- a. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."
 - b. This preacher went over there and put his hands on Saul of Tarsus to open his eyes. He did not put his hands on him to save him. He put his hands on him to open his eyes.
 - c. Someone told me once that this was meant to save him because Christians were wide awake and that sinners were blind and, therefore, he saved him when he put his hands on him.
 - d. But that is not so at all. If there were so Saul would have lost but three days, because he had been blind but three days.
 - e. The preacher put his hand on him to open his eyes. Then he said, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).
12. When you preach on the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, you do not have to explain Acts 22:16. All you have to do is read it and tell what Ananias told Saul of Tarsus to do.

- a. Of course, if you do not believe in the commandments that the Lord gave for sinners to obey, then you have to do some explaining to get out of that.
 - b. But if you believe what the Lord said, you can tell people that Saul of Tarsus had already believed in Christ, had already repented of his sins, and had been praying for three days.
 - c. The only thing left for him to do was to be baptized, and so Saul of Tarsus was told, "Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."
13. Some preachers today would have come in and said to Saul, "Call on the name of the Lord to wash away your sins, and then be baptized because your sins have been washed away."
- a. One older preacher in the brotherhood used to say that some false teachers can't even count one, two, three without getting it backwards.
 - b. The Lord told Saul:
 - i. #1, "Arise and be baptized;
 - ii. #2, to wash away thy sins;
 - iii. and #3, calling on the name of the Lord.
 - c. False teacher say:
 - i. #1 call on the name of the Lord,
 - ii. #2 to wash away thy sins;
 - iii. #3 and then arise and be baptized, because your sins have been washed away.
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 - iv. --exact opposite of what the Lord said in Acts 22:16.
14. Saul of Tarsus believed in Christ on the highway. Saul of Tarsus repented of his sins.
- a. Indeed, he confessed that he was speaking to Jesus Christ on the highway -- so you can put the confession in there if you want to- and then Saul of Tarsus was baptized in order that his sins might be washed away.
 - b. I know how he was baptized because he explained that in Romans 6:3-5. He said, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we

shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

- c. So Saul was buried in baptism, baptized into the death of Christ. He was planted with Christ and raised up to walk in newness of life.
 - d. If you are counting on water to save you when you are baptized, one drop would be as good as an ocean full.
 - i. But if you are counting on the Lord to save you, you need to have what the Lord said, and the Lord said that Paul was buried in baptism.
 - ii. He became a child of God by faith: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27).
 - e. So Saul of Tarsus was baptized in order to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.
15. Many years ago, one of the great debates in our brotherhood was a debate between N.B. Hardeman, president of Freed-Hardeman College, and Dr. Ben Bogard, who was president of a Baptist preacher college in Little Rock, Arkansas.
- a. That debate was in Little Rock, and it has gone down in history as one of the great debates in the brotherhood.
 - b. Two days of it were devoted to what people must do to be saved, and two days were devoted to how the Holy Spirit operated on sinners.
 - c. Bro. Hardeman said that "in conversion, conviction, and sanctification, every step that we take from the time that we decide to become a Christian until finally we pass through the gates which stand ajar into Heaven into the presence of God is begun, carried on, and consummated under the leadership of the Holy Spirit."
 - d. He then asked the question, "How does the Holy Spirit lead us?" He said, "The Holy Spirit leads us through the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit dwells in us through the Word of God."
 - i. We need those same sermons preached today - it would clear us a lot of confusion. That's what the Bible taught then, and that's what the Bible teaches today.
 - ii. The Holy Spirit operates on sinners through God's Word and how the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians is through the Word of God.
 - e. But during the live debate on baptism, Brother Hardeman did not have time to use Acts 22:16 in his speeches. There are so many places in the New Testament where the Lord

said for people to be baptized, that it would be hard to get them all in one speech or in one debate.

- i. After the debate was over, and plans were made for the debate to be published in a book, Dr. Bogard wrote to Brother Hardeman and said, "Dear Brother Hardeman, would you please write what you think Acts 22:16 means and put it into your speech and I will put in the answer to it in my speech so that all of the young preachers may have the benefit of what you have to say about it and what I have to say about it."
 - ii. So, Brother Hardeman did that; he said, "Dr. Bogard has written asking that I explain what Acts 22:16 means, where Ananias told Saul of Tarsus to arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins calling on the name of the Lord." Brother Hardeman said, "I think what he really meant was that Saul of Tarsus should not tarry any longer but that he should arise and be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord."
 - iii. You do not have to explain that, you just read it and tell what the Lord said.
16. One well known preacher in the brotherhood tells of the time he visited the holy lands and became close friends with a denominational preacher who was also in the same tour group.
 - a. The denominational preacher was a Greek scholar. On the way back, as they were flying into Athens, the gospel preacher turned behind him to where his preacher friend was sitting, it was about the middle of the night, and he was dozing, but he woke up and said, "What is wrong?"
 - b. The gospel preacher said, "nothing is wrong, but you are a Greek scholar and you are able to read the New Testament in Greek just as good as you can in English. Tell me what Acts 2:38 means in Greek."
 - c. He said, "Brother George, I have worried a lot about that. That verse really says to be baptized for the remission of sins. I know that is not the meaning of it because we are saved without baptism, but it sure does say that, and I have lost a lot of sleep worrying about why the Lord said that."
 - d. The preacher answered, "That's a peculiar thing, I never did lose any sleep over that."
 - e. He said, "Of course not, the way you people preach it, you would not lose any sleep over that. You would not worry about what it meant because you believe it means just what the Lord said."
 - f. So Brother Hardeman was right when he explained Acts 22:16 - it really meant just what it said.
 - g. This sinner had already believed, had already repented, had already confessed his faith

in Christ, and the next thing he needed to do was to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

- h. Saul did that, and then he went on his way as a Christian. He went down to Petra and stayed there three or four years.
 - i. Then he returned to Damascus preaching the gospel and after that went up to Jerusalem.
 - ii. He did not have to find the other apostles to find out what to preach because he was an inspired apostle and not whit behind the chiefest apostle.
 - iii. Therefore, the Lord gave him the message and told him what to preach.
- 17. The story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9, 22 and 26 is a plain and simple account of what this sinner did in order to be saved.
 - a. If we will do the same things today, the Lord will save us now just like he saved Saul of Tarsus at that time.