

## The Conversion of Saul

Acts 9, 22, 26

- William Barclay: “Most famous conversion story in history.” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 70)
- J. W. Roberts: “One of the most important events in human history.” (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 66)

### **1. 1<sup>st</sup> Introduction of Saul – Acts 7**

- 57: equivalent to Supreme Court justices leaping over table, pulling guns from their robes, and gunning defendant down before them.
- 58: illegal acc. to Roman Law: Luke does not record the Roman gov’t reaction to crime; illegal acc. to Jewish Law: no vote, discussion
- Punishment for blaspheming was stoning, Lv. 24:10-23; Dt. 13:6-11; a terrible way to die: (Josh. 7:24-26) 1. taken to place of stoning; 2. pushed off cliff; 3. boulders rolled down to crush; 4. pelted with stones until breath gone
- Stephen knelt, stoning probably wasn’t as bad
- 59: prayer directed to Jesus, few in Scripture
- 60: died with w prayer on his lips for his murderers, like Jesus (Lk. 12:34,46)
- Saul could never erase this scene from his mind.
- Augustine: “the church owes the preaching of Paul to the prayer of Stephen.”
- Ch. 8 “How to Become a Christian” focuses on Philip in Samaria (1-25) & with the Eunuch (26-40)

### **2. Conversion – Acts 9:1-19**

- 1: Saul born to Jewish parents in Tarsus, capitol of Cilicia, of tiny Benjamin; named for king, “called of God.” Roman citizenship and wealth; Pharisee: very strict. Raised on OT, writings include over 200 ref. from almost all OT books. Occupation: tentmaker. May have been a member of the Sanhedrin council.
- 2: Damascus had a large Jewish pop. and many synagogues, 140 mi NNE of Jerusalem, 1 week trip by foot.
- 1<sup>st</sup> time “the way” refers to Christianity, a fav. expression of Luke; Sanhedrin could punish, all Jews worldwide subject to HP, under Roman Law all Chr. were Jews
- 3: noon (22:6), last day of journey, Saul’s world turned upside down
- 4: no room for doubt; heard Heb. dialect, in Luke’s writings, double name means someone is in trouble (Lk. 10:41, 13:34, 22:31). Pricks: goads, long pointed stick tipped with iron used to prod animals
- 5: followers claimed Jesus was alive – right!

- 6: must: strong word, not optional. God's plan is for people to tell people how to be saved, not Jesus.
- 7: companions heard, did not understand
- 8: led into the city as a sorrowing sinner
- 9: Day 1: Lord appeared to Saul; D2: day after appearance; D3: Ananias came to Saul
- Fasted as a sign of penitence: Jonah 3:7; Saul was left in the dark (literally, spiritually, intellectually) for 3 days.
- 10: Ananias: "Jehovah is gracious"
- 11: Straight St. still exists in Damascus, 1mi.; Judas' home: where Saul was probably going
- 12: Ananias told in a vision about a vision
- 13: reluctance; 1<sup>st</sup> use of saints for Christians
- 14: Ananias had received word of Saul's authority
- 15: For the Lord, "*no is not an answer.*" Vessel: instrument, valuable container filled w/ precious contents. 1<sup>st</sup> mention Gentiles in plan.
- 16: agony: not a false picture. "When the Lord calls us to serve, He calls us to suffer." Roper; 2 Tim. 3:12
- 17: brother: Jewish designation, not Christian
- 18: immediately regained sight; commanded to be baptized, 22:16, and immediately was!
- 19: regained strength; Saul spent rest of his life spreading the faith he had once tried to destroy.

### **3A. Paul's Defense – Acts 22:1-21**

- Luke rarely duplicated himself; left details out of Ch. 9 to fill in Ch. 22 & 26
- 1 – Defense: Apologia: apology [1 Peter 3:15]
- 2 – established rapport
- 3 – has to win their confidence before preaching Jesus; Gamaliel died 5 yrs. Ago
- 4 – way = Christianity
- 5 – Elder = Jewish leader; Ananias HP [23:3]
- 6 – Farthest thing on his mind was becoming Christian
- 7 – doesn't use "resurrection;" they knew
- 9 – companions could still be in Jerusalem
- 10 – P always knew what he was doing before

- 11-13 – P spoke of Ananias not as a Chr. But favorable to the Jewish audience
- 14 – P eyewitness of the Righteous One
- 15 – Gentiles included in “all men”
- 16 – Paul did not hesitate; spiritual washing
- 17 – ready to speak of divine commission
- 18-20 – P argued w/ the Lord [Peter, Ac. 10]
- 21 – P wanted to stay in Jerusalem but God told him “GO!”

### **3B. Saul’s Persecution & Conversion – 26:9-18**

- 9: P admits he had once been where they are
- 10: Saints – now realized they were innocent
- 11: lit: “I tried to force” – admitting he was sometimes unsuccessful. *Emotional past*
- 12-14: everything in P’s upbringing was the Lord’s prodding him to accept Jesus, Gal. 1:15
- Goads/pricks: pointed sticks 6-8ft farmers would use to prod ox pulling the plow
- 15: divine goad pierced his heart, scalpel that reshaped his life
- 16: minister – different than normal GK word – one who serves a higher will; witness allowed P to be an apostle [1:22-23]
- 17: P frequently rescued
- 18: P’s mission was to open the eyes of the Jews & Gentiles alike

### **4. Labors – v. 20-31**

- 20: next Sabbath day Saul in synagogue; 1<sup>st</sup> time preached as “Son of God”
- 21: amazed at the message
- 22: moved from milk to meat; baffled Jews by proving Jesus is the Christ
- 23: returned from Arabia (Gal. 1:17), former allies now sought to put him out.
- 24: word of execution plan reached Saul; see his notes on this in 2 Cor. 11:32
- 25: escaped through a window, 2 Cor. 11:33
- 26: passing the place where the Lord appeared to him 3 years earlier (Gal. 1:18) (year appeared, last year, this year), desired to be with fellow Chr., a man without a friend in Jerusalem.
- 27: Barnabas takes up for Saul; last mention of apostles alone as leaders of Jer. Church
- 28: stayed w/ Peter, Gal. 1:18

- 29: Hellenistic synagogue the most dangerous place Saul could be
- 30: providentially plot known again; back home
- 31: progress report: church existed, enjoyed peace, grew, encouraged

**Lessons:**

- The “chief of all sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15) became a Christian. God was willing to forgive him, and He is willing to forgive you, too!
- Immediately after Saul was baptized, he went to work for the Lord. We need to begin laboring for Him and keep going until our last breath.
- The only way to be saved is to “call upon the name of the Lord (obedience: hear, believe, repent, confess, baptism)!”

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