

=CONVERSIONS=

Lesson 7

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

AIM: to teach my pupils the truths surrounding the conversion of the great Apostle Paul

POINT OF CONTACT: Write on the chalkboard certain things associated with each conversion we have studied so far. On the other side write the names of the people converted. Have them out of order and ask the pupils to place them in the right order.

I. SAUL'S PAST.

1. He was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, a free city of the Romans. Paul himself was a free man of that city. His father and mother were both native Jews; therefore, he called himself "a Hebrew of the Hebrews." He was of the tribe of Benjamin which adhered to Judah.
2. His education was in the schools of Tarsus. Tarsus was a little Athens as far as education is concerned; therefore, Saul acquainted himself with the philosophy and poetry of the Greeks. Later he was sent to the university of Jerusalem to study divinity and the Jewish law. There his tutor was Gamaliel, an eminent Pharisee.
3. He also had a craft, or a trade, which was tentmaking. This was common with those among the Jews who were bred scholars. They needed some way to earn their maintenance and avoid idleness. (It might be wise to stress the fact here that a good education should lead one to hard work. It should not be a substitute for work, but rather an aid for hard work.)
4. Saul hated and persecuted Christians. Notice the words, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," in Acts 9:1. Saul hated and persecuted Christians. The manner of his persecutions was threatening and slaughter. There's a persecution in threatenings. They terrify and break the spirit. He did more than threaten, however. If he could not prevail by frightening them from Christ, he slew them. He persecuted them to death, Acts 22:4. His breathing out threatenings and slaughter intimates that this was natural to him and was his constant business. In other words, it was as natural as breathing. This intimates that he was not satisfied with the blood of those whom he had slain. He still wanted more. It also intimates that he lived his life to persecute Christians. It was his very sustenance, his very breath.

II. THE PLACE OF SAUL'S CONVERSION. Acts 9:3, "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus." You will notice that he was not in the temple, nor in the synagogue, nor in the meeting place of the Christians. Rather, he was journeying. There are two things worth noting here. The first thing is that people are saved at many places. The plan of God was for the church to go where people are and to get them saved. Here is Saul, saved on a road on his way to Damascus. (It might be worthwhile to review the conversions that we have studied recently, and list the various places where they transpired. One was saved on a cross and another, up a tree.)

It is also interesting to observe that since Paul was to be the apostle to the Gentiles, he was converted to faith in Christ in Gentile country. He was a very strict Jew, but God had chosen him as a vessel to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles. Hence, it was in a Gentile country where he came to Christ.

You will notice in Acts 9:4 that it says that Saul fell to the earth. Now, some think that he was on foot and that this light which perhaps was accompanied by a thunderclap so terrified him that he could not keep on his feet, but fell upon his face in a posture of adoration or astonishment. It was more probable, however, that he was not traveling by foot, but that he was mounted. Bear in mind that Saul was in a public post and was no doubt in a hurry. Also, the journey was long, so that it was not likely that he would travel on foot. Perhaps the sudden light frightened the beast and made the beast throw him to the earth.

III. THE WORD OF GOD. Saul not only saw a light from Heaven, but heard a voice from Heaven. Read Acts 9:4 again. Wherever the glory of God is seen, the voice of God is heard, Exodus 20:18. God's manifestations of Himself were never without His Word, for He magnifies His Word. What was seen was always designed to make way for what was said. Hence, Saul heard a voice. The Scripture teaches that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. No one is ever saved without the seed, which is the Word.

IV. THE ADDRESSING OF SAUL. Notice in verse 4 the words, "Saul, Saul." This is very, very interesting. So often in the Scripture God uses a name twice. When He does, there is a definite reason why the name is mentioned twice.

1. He shows He is in earnest. "Martha, Martha," Luke 10:41.
2. Sometimes He wants to arrest one's attention. "Simon, Simon," Luke 22:31.
3. Sometimes it is because of a broken heart. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," Matthew 23:37.
4. Sometimes it is in a spiritual call. "Samuel, Samuel," I Samuel 3:10.
5. He does it when one is in imminent danger. He said in the Old Testament, "Saul, Saul."

V. THE REAL ONE WHO WAS PERSECUTED. Notice the words in Acts 9:4b, "Why persecutest thou me?" and in verse 5, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Now bear in mind, Saul had been persecuting Christians, but he was not the one who nailed Christ to the cross. Nevertheless, Jesus said it was He Who was persecuted. This is very interesting. Christ never complained so much of those who persecuted Him in His own person as He did of those who persecuted Him in His followers. No doubt, every parent has said, "It hurts me worse than it does you." This is true. When one whom we love is persecuted, it persecutes us more than if we ourselves were suffering the same persecution. This is a blessed and sweet truth, that our Lord hurts when we hurt.

VI. THE SOUL WINNER. Look at Acts 9:5c at the words, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." It means, "It is hard for thee to spurn the spur." Who won Saul to Christ? There is no doubt in the minds of Bible scholars that Stephen was the one. When Stephen was martyred, Saul was a young man, and he was holding the coats of those that martyred Stephen. He saw the face of Stephen as he died. He saw his face light up like an angel. He heard his words, "Lay not this sin to their charge." See Acts 7:60. He couldn't get away from it. It constantly pricked him. This is why Jesus said, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

VII. SAUL WAS READY TO SERVE GOD AND TO CALL HIM LORD. Notice in Acts 9:6 he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He first admitted that Christ was his Lord. He then was willing to serve. His question was not, "Would you have me to do something?" His question was, "What wouldst thou have me to do?" It was a foregone conclusion that he should do something. The question was what should he do. This was the proof of true conversion.

VIII. THE FOLLOW-UP. God was not willing to leave Saul without Christian fellowship and someone to strengthen him. Hence, He spoke to a Christian (Acts 9:10) whose name was Ananias and told that Christian to make a visit on a prospect. He even gave him the address and told him what to say. Every new convert needs someone to strengthen him and help him. Saul was no exception. He was taken under the wing of Ananias; he was baptized immediately (as has been the case in every conversion we have studied thus far), and he grew in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

CONCLUSION: Hence, we have the conversion of one of the great men of all time. The Roman name of Saul was Paul, which means "little." It is very interesting that one of the ancients called him "Homo Tricubitalis," which means "about four-and-a-half feet in height." In other words, one of the ancients would call him, "Hello, Little Four-and-a-Half-Footer." This is not very tall. Obviously he was a runt, but a great man of God. God can use little people, and has often done so.