

25th January 2023- The Conversion of Paul

"Encounter":

Acts 9: 3 to 19- The conversion of Paul.

Verses 3 to 9 record Paul's conversion outside the city of Damascus. That his conversion occurs here initially, rather than later at the house of Judas.


In Verse 11 Paul had a personal encounter with Jesus as the risen Lord, obeyed Jesus words to him, responded to Jesus call to be a "minister and be a witness" for Him to the Gentiles of the gospel, and subsequently gave himself to prayer and fasting for three days. Paul is called "Brother Saul" by Ananias when they meet. Ananias believed by revelation that Saul had already had a saving encounter with the Lord Jesus, is now ready to be a committed disciple of Jesus and fulfil God's mission, and thus needs now only to be water baptized as a public identification with Christ, have his sight restored and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

After Paul encounters Jesus and accepts Him as Lord and Messiah, he fasts and prays for guidance with an attitude of deep commitment to God. A saving encounter with Jesus should always result in a spiritual hunger and longing to know more about Jesus and to pursue Him in prayer and fasting for more revelation and wholeness.


Acts 9:10-18

PAUL'S CONVERSION



"Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized." (Acts 9:18)



Paul was willing to follow Jesus and asked Him, "what do You want me to do?" Then, he became blind for three days. Paul renounced his position as an apostle of the Sanhedrin and became an apostle of Jesus.



He had to meet the Church and become part of it. Then he could work together with the Church.

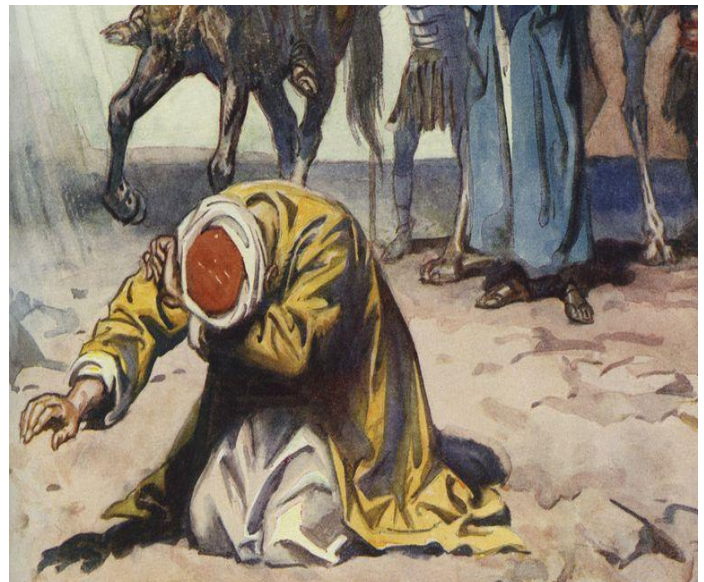


Ananias was called for that purpose. He had reasonable doubts, but he finally met Paul. He restored his sight and confirmed his divine calling. Ananias encouraged Paul to be baptized and become part the Church.

The story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is told in Acts 9:1-19 and retold by Paul in Acts 22:6-21 and Acts 26:12-18.

Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee in Jerusalem after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, swore to wipe out the new Christian church, called The Way. Acts 9:1 says that Paul was "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples." Saul obtained letters from the high priest, authorizing him to arrest any followers of Jesus in the city of Damascus.

On the Road to Damascus, Saul and his companions were struck down by a blinding light. Saul heard a voice say, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4, NIV) When Saul asked who was speaking, the voice replied: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:5-6, NIV)



Saul was blinded. His companions led him into Damascus to a man named Judas, on Straight Street. For three days Saul was blind and didn't eat or drink.

Meanwhile, Jesus appeared in a vision to a disciple in Damascus named Ananias and told him to go to Saul. Ananias was afraid because he knew Saul's reputation as a merciless persecutor of the church.

Jesus repeated his command, explaining that Saul was his chosen instrument to deliver the gospel to the Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel.

So Ananias found Saul at Judas' house, praying for help. Ananias laid his hands on Saul, telling him Jesus had sent him to restore his sight and that Saul might be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again.



He arose and was baptized into the Christian faith. Saul ate, regained his strength, and stayed with the Damascus disciples three days.

After his conversion, Saul changed his name to Paul.

Saul of Tarsus possessed perfect qualifications to be an evangelist: He was versed in Jewish culture and language, his upbringing in Tarsus made him familiar with the Greek language and culture, his training in Jewish theology helped him connect the Old Testament with the gospel, and as a skilled tentmaker he could support himself.

Paul's life-changing experience on the Damascus Road led to his baptism and instruction in the Christian faith. He became the most determined of the apostles, suffering brutal physical pain, persecution, and finally, martyrdom. He revealed his secret of enduring a lifetime of hardship for the gospel:

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13, NKJV)

Few Insights:

- When God brings a person to faith in Jesus Christ, he already knows how he wants to use that person in service to his kingdom. Sometimes people are slow to understand God's plan and may even resist it.
- Paul's conversion showed that Jesus himself wanted the gospel message to go to the Gentiles, quashing any argument from the early Jewish Christians that the gospel was only for the Jews.
- The men with Saul did not see the risen Jesus, but Saul did. This miraculous message was meant for one person only, Saul.

- The scales falling from Paul's eyes symbolized a spiritual transformation that allowed him to see the truth. Once he knew the truth about Jesus, there was no going back.
- Saul witnessed the risen Christ, which fulfilled the qualification of an apostle (Acts 1:21-22). Only those who had seen the risen Christ could testify to his resurrection.

Life lessons:

In one moment of fear, enlightenment, and regret, Saul understood that Jesus was the true Messiah and that he (Saul) had helped murder and imprison innocent people. Despite his previous beliefs as a Pharisee, he now knew the truth about God and was obligated to obey him. Paul's conversion proves that God can call and transform anyone he chooses, even the most hard-hearted.

Jesus did not distinguish between his church and his followers, and himself. Jesus told Saul he had been persecuting **him**. Anyone who persecutes Christians, or the Christian church, is persecuting Christ himself.

A person's past does not matter to Christ. He is more interested in a person's future. Even though Saul had been one of Jesus' cruellest enemies, he became one of his closest friends. God's forgiveness is full and final.

God often chooses the most unlikely people to accomplish his will. Over and over in the Bible, God picked flawed men and women to help carry out his plan of salvation. The lesson is that the power comes from God; the person is only a vessel.

When God calls a person to a task, he equips that person for it. Paul received the Holy Spirit, along with the truth of the gospel so he could share it with others. Paul could not have achieved this remarkable accomplishment in his own strength. He was empowered by God.

Reflection:

Through the power of Christ, a man who had been a hate-filled villain became a love-filled hero.

By submitting himself completely to Jesus, Paul was able to spread the gospel throughout the known world.

The same Jesus who rose from the dead and transformed Paul wants to work in your life too.

What could Jesus do through you if you surrendered as Paul did and gave him complete control of your life? Maybe God will call you to work quietly behind the scenes like the little known Ananias, or perhaps you'll reach multitudes like the great Apostle Paul.