

STORY

Conversion of Saul to be God's Special Servant - Acts 9:1-19

TEACHER PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I thank You for the love You gave to Saul, and that Your love supported him through all his trials as Your spokesman. I ask for a measure of that support for me in my teaching and living today. Open my mouth that I may present You to these children in all Your saving grace and loving care. As always, in Your Savior name. Amen.

OUTER AIM

When God saved Saul's soul, He also prepared him to be the great Christian apostle and missionary Paul.

INNER AIM

God's love is for all people, the Jew and Gentile.

BACKGROUND

(Rupprecht Bible History References Vol. 2, pp. 505-518)

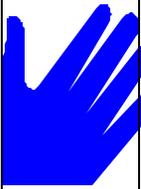
We have seen how God worked on a Christian Jew, Peter, to recognize the needs of the gentiles. The LORD had an even bigger job getting a non-Christian Jew, Saul, to see his own needs and God's love for him in Christ Jesus. Converting Saul was a special miracle of grace, and the apostle Paul said many times that if God saved him, God could save anyone. So saving Saul was one small step in God's larger program of saving souls--Jew and gentile--all over the world for centuries to come.

v.1,2

- ▶ Saul was a super-Jew, a premier champion of Pharisaism, which is the conscientious attempt to be "right with God?" by the route of obedience to the commandments.
- ▶ This life-style attempts to prove to God that "I am a really good person?" and God ought to reward me; it is, of course, in direct conflict with the Christ-centered approach: "God loves me, not because I'm a good person, but because He is such a wonderful Person to forgive me for what I am and what I do against Him."
- ▶ Saul had to learn this for himself before he could help others to learn it.
- ▶ Since Saul was actually convinced that Jesus was a false prophet, he volunteered for the privilege of persecuting His followers as far away as Damascus, 140 miles NE of Jerusalem.
- ▶ He was hoping to arrest and extradite such heretics back to Jerusalem, where they stood little chance of surviving the fate of Stephen--which, by the way, had been a pleasure for Saul to watch (ch.7:58-8:3).
- ▶ "The Way" is a term used to identify the Christian religion, which was not the way of the unbeliever, nor the way of the Jewish religion, but the Way of Jesus.

v.3-9

- ▶ Jesus stopped Saul and set him straight.
- ▶ Here Luke is reporting what Paul himself later told the Jerusalem mob (Acts 22) and again King Agrippa (Acts 26).
- ▶ We usually assert that Saul was converted on the highway by this confrontation with Jesus, but the text does not pinpoint the moment or hour or day when Saul's heart was won over to Jesus as his



Savior and LORD.

- ▶ It probably happened gradually during the three days of his anguish (blindness, nervous tension, isolation) after which Saul was given the Christian greeting "brother Saul," and received his sight and was baptized.

v. 3

- ▶ Jesus chose the time and place to arrest this "storm-trooper?" in a reality check that would convince Saul that the Christians were correct, while he had been in the wrong.
- ▶ The intense, blinding light (ch.26:13) evidently hit so hard that he suffered a jarring fall from his horse.

v. 4

- ▶ There on the ground, disoriented and blinded, he knew that he was at the mercy of whoever was speaking.
- ▶ The voice from heaven called out his name in Hebrew with the soul-piercing question: "WHY ARE YOU PERSECUTING ME?"
- ▶ Indeed, WHY ME? What do you think you have to gain by this? What prompts such ungodly behavior against ME?

v. 5

- ▶ Because of the terrifying voice of the unidentified heavenly person, Saul knew that someone in heaven (Moses? Gabriel? Abraham?) was really angry with him.
- ▶ But to whom should he apologize? "Who are you, lord?"
- ▶ The answer: "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting!" left Saul "trembling and astonished," because this meant that the Jesus he had rejected was not a false prophet at all, but was really reigning at the right hand of the Father in heaven!
- ▶ The awful truth now scalded Saul's heart that he had been duped by Satan to attack God Himself, and the horrifying dread possessed him that an angry God would exact a terrible payment from him for this sin.
- ▶ The statement that "it is hard for you to kick against the goads" (just as an ox hurts himself if he kicks against a sharpened cattle-prod) reminded Saul that he had often heard the truth about Jesus from Christians, but had reacted angrily against the Spirit's prodding him to submit to the truth.

v. 6

- ▶ What penalty would be demanded from him?
- ▶ He had to find out.
- ▶ "Lord (*Master*, rather than *LORD Jehovah*), *what do you want me to do*"--to make restitution for my vicious opposition to you and your people?
- ▶ We must say that this is not yet the response of a converted heart, for Saul still expected to appease God by his own personal payment.
- ▶ Jesus' answer "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" still left him in the dark to wonder what an upset God was planning as a suitable "pay-back."

v. 7-8

- ▶ Everybody else in the group had also been knocked flat (ch.26:14) , so Saul had to take charge to get them into Damascus, even as he remained blinded and helpless.
- ▶ They found lodging at Judas' house on Straight Street.

v. 9

- ▶ What the Spirit did for Saul during those three days and nights is not revealed to us.
- ▶ Yet it was prime time for God to work on Saul's heart.
- ▶ Saul would review the Scriptures he had in his memory banks, especially the prophecies of the Messiah and what he had heard about Jesus from His followers.
- ▶ He could not relax enough to eat--and perhaps slept but little--because he was totally absorbed in sifting through his guilt of disbelief, in recycling the meaning of the prophecies, and in rehearsing the Spirit's prodding.

v. 10

- ▶ God enlisted a mature Christian in His venture to reclaim Saul.
- ▶ Ananias' response "Here I am, Lord?" came from a heart ready and willing to serve his Savior.

v.11-12

- ▶ Directions follow--the street and house address where he could find Saul, praying for the help God had available for him coming in the person of Ananias armed with God's love.

v.13-14

- ▶ It was natural that Ananias, under threat of persecution, would have reservations about approaching Saul, already notorious for his assaults on God's people.

v. 15-16

- ▶ Of course, Ananias did not know what God had already done to disarm Saul, so God briefly outlined His progress with Saul: a) I have selected Saul as a chosen vessel of Mine; b)I am authorizing him to represent Me wherever I send him, to Jew and gentile, the lowly and the regal; c) and he will get rehabilitated under My chastisement.

v.17

- ▶ That evidently was enough to gain Ananias' support as a co-worker, so off he went, found Saul and gladly welcomed him into God's family as his brother in Jesus the Messiah.
- ▶ He continued with assurances that this meeting had been programmed in heaven by Jesus for the purpose of healing Saul's sight (both spiritual and physical) and giving him the Holy Spirit to fill the void left by his Pharisaism and then to empower Saul for God's service.

v.18

- ▶ The miracle followed, of course,--visible to Saul and to others.
- ▶ Baptism next--not to initiate faith, but to give Saul the assurance that his soul had been cleansed and to initiate him into the Christian fellowship with the saints of God.

v.19

- ▶ Breakfast next--with good Christian friends--and in a shared love that overcame emotional scars as they got to know one another better.
- ▶ Saul was on his way to becoming one of God's extra-special vessels (containers) that would pour out God's redeeming love to others. All glory to God in the highest!

STUDENT PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I thank You for the love You showed me by making me one of Your dear children. Keep my soul free from Satan's grip until I will join You in our heavenly home. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

PRESENTATION

Tell the story in your own words with the same emotion and excitement as if you were there.

ACTIVITY

- Color the picture on page 1. Carefully cut along the three dark lines. Fold along the one dashed line near the top of the flap you just made.
- At this point you may want the children to glue a second sheet of paper to the back of page one. This would make attaching the picture of Jesus somewhat easier.
- Color the picture of Jesus below. Cut it out. Glue this picture onto page one behind the flap that lifts up. Either glue it so that it is on the back of the flap that lifts up, or the picture could be glued to the backer sheet that you added. Whichever way you think looks best.
- Cut out the word box below. Glue it to the bottom of page one.
- Use you finished page one to tell the story of how Saul became a Christian.

APPLICATIONS

1. The subject of conversion is a natural with this Bible account, and Saul's dramatic case is recorded for a number of reasons. Primarily, it demonstrates that God is so filled with grace and love that He can salvage and rehabilitate the most perverse sinners, including blasphemers. Paul later referred to himself as an example of the way God's love reaches out to the "worst sinners.?"
2. In addition, we may deduce some truths about conversion: a) It is God's will and God's power that salvage a lost soul, turn it around, and then use the convert to help others. b) If a person begins to feel that he has made a contribution to his own conversion, he should review Paul's personal experience supported by the Spirit's testimony in Romans (esp. the close of ch.3, and ch.5:6-11) and the theme of God's grace promoted in every Pauline Epistle (see Eph.2:8-9).c) Current popular theology that "you should accept Christ? or "make your decision for Christ? puts a dangerous *self-centered slant* on conversion; although this approach purports to be a gospel invitation, it may also rob God of His glory.
3. Few conversions are as dramatic as Saul's--simply because his case was so extreme that it required extreme measures to salvage him. So we refrain from using Saul's example as the paradigm of genuine conversions.
4. Yet it has common denominators for adult conversions: a) the realization that one has been opposed to God's will and work in Jesus; b) soul-searching in the light of Scripture (which for Saul took three days), yielding repentance for having been God's enemy; and c)an application of assurance that God loves and forgives.
5. God has a plan for each Christian's life; a purpose for our existence on earth; a calling, be it missionary, teacher, pastor, businessperson, homemaker, etc.; His hand touches us at all stages of life--teenager, parent, or grandparent--for God is always giving us openings to touch others as Ananias did to Saul, and as Saul did for others.
6. Saul became the great Christian apostle and missionary Paul; God also inspired him to write over a dozen of our New Testament books, filled with doctrine, instruction, explanations, etc., for upbuilding us even today. You can get better acquainted with this extraordinary person in a Bible dictionary or Rupprecht Bible History References, II, 506-507. We today are still receiving the blessed fall-out from what God did to him and for him.
7. Jesus can overcome hatred and unbelief in any sinner's heart. God works this out in every conversion (also for infants), because a soul can be freed from Satan's grip only by a stronger hand--the hand of God's love. God pulled Saul dramatically free of Satan's grip, as this record of Acts 9 shows us.

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

Lower

I Cor 6:11 - But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

I Cor. 15:10 - By the grace of God I am what I am , and His grace toward me was not in vain.

Middle any of the above and...

Gal. 1:15-16 - "...it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace..."

Rom.10:4 - For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes.

Eph. 1:3-5 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

Upper any of the above and...

I Tim.1:15-16 - This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

Acts 26:18 - "...to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

Phil. 3:7-8 - But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ.

HYMN CHOICES

"Chief of Sinners Though I be" (TLH #342)

"Grace! 'Tis a Charming Sound" (TLH #374)

"My God, Accept My Heart this Day" (TLH #336)