

The Conversion of Saul

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Introduction

The initial account of Saul's conversion is recorded in Acts Chapter 9. Later, in making his defense before the Jews (Acts 22) and before King Agrippa, (Acts 26), these events are again related. Let us consider these combined accounts in order to gain a better understanding of how sinful men can be restored to God's blessed fellowship and favor.

His Misdirected Zeal

Before his conversion, Saul of Tarsus was a devout disciple of Judaism, a Pharisee, who zealously persecuted the church (Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-2; 22:3-5). His fanaticism is reflected in the following statement: "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities" (Acts 26:4-11, esp. vs. 9-11).

His Miraculous Experience

The Lord appeared unto Saul on the Damascus road, calling him into service, commissioning him as an apostle, and commanding him to enter the city to await further instruction (Acts 9:3-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-18). Saul saw a light from heaven, brighter than the noonday sun, shining all around him and his travelling companions. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice, saying in the Hebrew dialect, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Saul replied, "Who are You, Lord?" The Lord answered, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." He was told, "Get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."

His Momentous Commission

Afterwards, the Lord instructed Ananias to go to Saul, restoring his physical vision, and revealing his future purpose (Acts 9:10-12). Initially, Ananias was cautious, having heard of Saul's past persecutions in Jerusalem, and the present peril he posed to the saints in Damascus. However, the Lord Jesus comforted Ananias, saying, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:13-16; cf. 26:16-18). Accordingly, Ananias came before Saul, communicating the message of Christ, commissioning him as an apostle, and commanding him to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 9:17; 22:12-16; cf. 2:38-39).

His Marvelous Response

After Saul's sight was restored, he arose and was baptized, and soon thereafter began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus, saying, "He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:18-22). Although Christ had a plan and purpose, Saul was no puppet, but the possessor of a free will. Speaking to King Agrippa, the apostle Paul said, "I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:19-20).

Conclusion

On the road to Damascus, Saul saw the resurrected Savior, qualifying him to serve as an apostle, enabling him to offer eye-witness testimony of the truth of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-11). The apostle Paul was ever grateful for the spiritual blessings he received through Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:1-11). If we follow his example, we can share the same salvation (1 Tim. 1:12-17).