

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE EARLY CHURCH

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PART 10: THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

SAUL'S CONVERSION

Saul did not know that the Godhead had planned for him to become the apostle that replaced Judas Iscariot before the foundation of the world. He was unaware that he was a chosen vessel by which the Holy Spirit was going to speak and create a portion of the New Testament to guide the church of Jesus for the next 2,000 years.

“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)... But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace...” (Galatians 1:1, 15)

As a Pharisee, Saul thought that he was doing the work of God in persecuting the followers of Jesus; he was in reality an agent of Satan. He was immune to the preaching of Jesus being crucified and resurrected from the dead. It would take the personal intervention of Jesus to turn Paul around. The plan before the foundation of the world was to remove Saul from Jerusalem and ambush him outside the city of Damascus in Syria. **Acts 9:1-2**

Saul was not traveling alone; he had soldiers to arrest and bring the Christians back to Jerusalem to be tried in a kangaroo court and executed. The trap was sprung when a light shone from above enveloped Saul; a force threw him to the ground, and a powerful voice questioned Saul's motives. **verses 3-4**

Laying on the ground and shaken, Saul cried out in desperation, wondering who was speaking to him. Jesus responded by telling Saul that He was none other than the resurrected Jesus. The Son of God wanted to know why Saul was persecuting Him and then uttered a colloquial expression that is not understood by many today. **verse 5**

“Kicking against the pricks” was a Greek proverb associated with agriculture. Farmers used a stick with a pointed piece of iron on its tip – known as an ox goad – to prod the oxen when plowing. The pain of a prick was intended to steer the animal in the right direction, but sometimes an ox rebelled by kicking out at the prick, causing the prick to be driven further into its flesh. In essence, the more an ox rebelled, the more it suffered.

Jesus knocking Saul to the ground served as an example that he was in a losing battle with the Godhead. Paul's actions up to this point were two-fold:

1. To scatter the church because they failed to follow the great commission. [Sanctioned by God]
2. To destroy the church and kill its proponents. [Sanctioned by the Devil]



Now that the church was scattered, Jesus was reigning in Saul and any attempt to resist this divine action was just as senseless as an ox kicking against the prick. Saul was sincere in his fight against Christianity, but he was not heading in the direction wanted by the Godhead. Jesus was now actively steering Saul in the correct direction.

The expression used by Jesus was not lost on Saul as he recognized that he had been bucking God from the beginning. Jesus had been the real deal! Jesus was the Messiah! Jesus was God!

Trembling and not fully understanding exactly what had just happened, Saul asked what was the next step. Jesus instructed him to go into Damascus and await further instructions. **verse 6**

The detachment of soldiers brought by Saul stood speechless. They had seen a bright light envelope Saul on his horse; witnessed him thrown to the ground, and then heard him converse with a voice that seemingly came from the sky. **verse 7**

Saul had closed his eyes because of the bright light, but when he got up from the ground and opened his eyes, he realized that he was now blind. A soldier took his hand and led him into the city and lodging was found for him. **verse 8**

ALONE IN PRAYER AND FASTING

Saul was in a stage of shock. He had been confronted with supernatural power that had thrown him off his horse. He was horrified to discover that the voice speaking to him was none other than the person he hated above anyone else, Jesus, was in fact, God!

His entire theological system had crumbled. Some of the things learned from Gamaliel no longer had value. Saul was crushed as his life work had gone up in smoke; now, all he could do was fast and pray, which he did, for three days. **verse 9**

ENTER ANANIAS

It is important to note that all these events were ordained before the foundation of the world by the Godhead. We do not know who Ananias was or where he was from, but we can assume he was not from Damascus. He was more than likely one of the Christians that had been driven from Jerusalem. Jesus came to him in a vision three days later, more than likely when he was lying down, and just like Samuel did as child a thousand years earlier, Ananias affirmed his readiness to serve. **verse 10**

Jesus gave him a specific address where Saul was lodging, and to forestall any doubt on Ananias' part, was told that Saul was praying. These were not the prayers of a righteous Pharisee, but a broken-hearted sinner. Jesus felt it was sufficient to describe Saul's character and intent with just two words... "he prays." **verse 11**

Saul had also been shown in a vision that Ananias was going to arrive, lay hands on him, and restore his sight. **verse 12**

Have you ever wondered why it was common for the early church to "lay hands" on people when they prayed for them? It was customary within the Hebrew culture to

touch the person being consecrated for an office to denote the authority of the person doing the commissioning.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him.” (Numbers 27:18)

This news made Ananias uneasy as he related how much evil Saul had done against the Christians in Jerusalem, and now, he had come to Damascus to do the same thing. **verses 13-14**

Jesus responded that Saul was a chosen vessel – an instrument used to accomplish a specific purpose – who would be a missionary to the Gentiles,¹ to kings,² and to the Israelites.³ **verse 15**

Saul would not just profess repentance, but he was going to suffer greatly for switching sides. The message of the Gospel would cause a lot of physical suffering in his life.⁴ **verse 16**

BROTHER SAUL

Ananias was a faithful and obedient follower of Jesus. God activated Ananias three days after Saul arrived in Damascus to come and lay hands on him. It is noteworthy that Ananias addressed Saul as “Brother Saul,” which indicates that the persecutor had indeed repented and joined the church of Jesus. Saul received his sight back the moment Ananias laid hands on him. **verses 17-18a**

It is clear there was more interaction not recorded by Luke because Ananias must have instructed Saul of the need to be baptized in water. It is likely that Ananias took Saul to the Barada River that flows through Damascus and more than likely performed the baptism. **verse 18b**

Saul had not eaten for three days, and when he was given food, his body was nourished and he felt stronger. Ananias undoubtedly vouched for Saul with the Christians in Damascus. **verse 19**

PREACHING CHRIST

Saul was very familiar with the Old Testament, which included all the references to the Messiah. Having been with the Christians in Damascus for at least a few days, Saul must have asked them many questions about Jesus, and combined with this new knowledge, he visited different synagogues in Damascus to declare that Jesus is the Messiah and the only begotten Son of God. Jesus of Nazareth was not a mere man, but a divine person, the God-man. **verses 20**

¹ Romans 11:13; 15:16; Galatians 2:8

² Acts 25:23; 26:32; 27:24

³ Acts 9:20-22; 13:46; 28:17

⁴ Acts 20:23; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27; 2 Timothy 1:11-12

This caused a great commotion within the Jewish community at Damascus, who could not understand why the chief persecutor of Christians had suddenly become a fiery preacher of Jesus. **verse 21**

The text does not say it, but it is clear that Saul had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, and in his debates with the Jews in the city, many came to the realization that Jesus was the Messiah. **verse 22**

ESCAPING DAMASCUS

The text does not reveal whether the Jewish leadership in Damascus – rabbis, scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees – contacted the high priest in Jerusalem. The soldiers assigned to Saul must have returned to Jerusalem and reported that Jesus had personally recruited Saul, and instead of persecuting Christians, Saul was now boldly preaching about the risen Messiah. Time passed and the order was given to kill Saul since he had become a liability to their cause. **verses 23**

Saul was aware of their assassination plan and hid himself so they could not find him. **verse 24**

The Christian leadership in Damascus was organized with a central leadership that made the decision to safely remove Saul before the ungodly Jewish leadership killed him. Damascus was a fortified city with walls and the entry/exit points were watched by the assassins. The Christians opted to help Saul escape by lowering him down in a basket from the city wall. **verse 25**

HOT COMMODITY

From a human viewpoint, it was insane for Saul to return to Jerusalem where he was known by sight to the Jewish leadership. He was now considered a traitor and they had no further use of him; nevertheless, the Holy Spirit had other plans.

Since he knew where the apostles were located in Jerusalem, Saul tried to make contact with them, but they were afraid and wanted nothing to do with him. More than likely, they thought he was up to some trick to capture them. **verse 26**

Barnabas vouched for Saul, that he had been personally selected by Jesus; many had witnessed his preaching, and that the power of the Holy Spirit was evident in his life. **verse 27**

Saul boldly preached Christ crucified on the streets in Jerusalem and was not afraid to debate the Grecian Jews, who decided to murder Saul after they discovered the Holy Spirit in him was too much for them to overcome. **verses 28-29**

This action was ironic given that this is what had taken place with Stephen; Saul now found himself in a similar situation as the losers of the debate wanted to kill him.

Some of the Christians discovered the plot and they undertook to smuggle Saul to the port city of Caesarea and back home to Tarsus. **verse 30**

The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem stopped the persecution for the time being and the churches from Jerusalem to Galilee in the north prospered. **verse 31**

SUMMARY

The story of Saul thus far should inspire and increase your faith that the Godhead is always in control, no matter the circumstance. Jesus could have easily reached Saul just like with Stephen and the other people after the day of Pentecost. But God had a two-fold plan for Saul:

1. Saul was going to apply pressure on the Christians in Jerusalem and force them to flee. His first assignment was scattering the Christians from Jerusalem to different places like Syria, Lebanon and Egypt.⁵
2. Jesus had a plan to recruit Saul and bring him over to the Kingdom of God. It started with him being born again and discovering the divine plan for his life.

God has a plan for each human being and the first step is to be born again. Most people never ask God what He wants them to do with their lives and they are more or less useless in the Kingdom of God.

*"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?
Then said I, Here am I; send me." (Isaiah 6:8)*

Has God been speaking to you? Are you willing to let God be in charge and lead you?

Remember, it's not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!

Do you have an ear to hear with?

⁵ A huge group of Christians from Jerusalem found its way to Antioch, Lebanon. This was the first large church that later sent missionaries throughout the Roman Empire.