



ACTS 9

SAUL'S "CONVERSION"

Saul of Tarsus was a man of deep conviction, confidence, passion, and zeal. He was raised in a commercial city visited by travelers, trained in the best schools in Jerusalem, and honored among his peers as a rising leader. Indeed, the future appeared bright for young Saul.

In his early 20's, Saul accepted a commission to eradicate an upstart movement which boldly claimed that the awaited Messiah of Israel had not only come but also had been violently killed by the Romans. Initially those making this claim were largely centered in Jerusalem but steadily moved outward to surrounding areas. They were committed to publicly declaring that this Messiah had not only been crucified but had risen to new life and ascended to the right hand of Yahweh in Heaven.

For Saul, the belief that the promised Messiah had come in the person of Jesus and that He arose from the dead was blasphemous. He recognized that Israel remained under foreign oppression precisely because of their failure to honor God. This upstart group with their "misguided message" could not be allowed to bring further dishonor to God. As he states in his own testimony in Acts 26:9-10a "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did..."

God's people ignored Him, resulting in conquest by the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and finally Romans. If Israel was to experience true freedom again as a

nation, they would need to demonstrate wholehearted zeal and uncompromising faithfulness to God as revealed in the Old Testament.

As Saul traveled north to Damascus, Syria, perhaps all of these things were on his mind. On that dusty road, the unthinkable occurred: “Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’” (Acts 9:3b-4).

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” (Acts 9:5b). Could it be? Could this Jesus he had been persecuting be the Messiah? Could everything Saul thought he knew about this upstart movement be wrong?

Now was not the time for such questions, however. As suddenly as Saul’s sight had been awakened by the brilliant appearance of Jesus, he was left in darkness without sight. This powerful man on the rise now had to be led by the men traveling with him to Damascus. Although he had reached the intended destination, the journey took him to an unexpected calling and purpose.

Saul had been chosen by God to be an instrument to carry the good news of Jesus to the nations and to suffer much for this cause. In the home of Ananias, a disciple of Jesus, Saul received a confirmation of this commission. “Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized...” (Acts 9:17b-18).

Perhaps no one was more qualified for this important mission than this man, Saul of Tarsus. Not only was he highly educated, he also worked with his hands as a tent maker and could relate to all kinds of people. He was a Roman citizen with the ability and opportunity to connect with travelers from all over the Empire. He would need all these skills and attributes for his unique calling.

Saul’s training in the Hebrew Scriptures enabled him to explain how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah to both Jews and Gentiles. As Saul’s eyes were opened, so too would he open the eyes of Israel and the nations to see that Jesus is the risen Messiah, the true light of the world.