

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

(Acts 9:1-9)

OUTLINE

Saul's early life - Hebrew and Roman - A Greek of Tarsus - Trained at Jerusalem - Taught by Gamaliel - The church grew - Jerusalem no longer the center - Saul's conversion - Jesus still living - Persecuting Jesus - In Damascus - The Lord still working - Believe in Christ

1. Persecution cannot destroy the church.
2. God in His providence fits men for the work which he plans.
3. The Spirit of God can make new the most hardened heart.
4. Regeneration is a sudden transformation of the heart.
5. No man can stand in the presence of God's glory.
6. God can work with means, without means, or against means.
7. The grace of God is beyond our comprehension.

There is a brief statement about Saul in the first three verses of the eighth chapter. We purposely omitted any special discussion of Saul in the consideration of that chapter so that we might discuss his life more fully as the early life of Saul. He flashes before us for the first time in the account of the stoning of Stephen when the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man whose name was Saul. Here and there, however, in his speeches or in his writings, Saul gives us glimpses into his early life and reveals facts concerning his parents so that we have a fair idea of his youth and young manhood.

HIS EARLY LIFE

Saul was of pure Hebrew parentage. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. He was born in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia. His parents were strict Pharisees. He was circumcised, according to the Hebrew law, when he was eight days old. He was trained to observe the law very strictly. He received his schooling at Jerusalem under the noted rabbi, Gamaliel. His father was a Roman citizen and he, therefore, by birth was a Roman. Every Roman citizen was required to know the Latin language. Saul's father, being able to speak Latin, it is almost certain that Saul learned it when a young man. Born as he was in a Greek city, the third educational center of the world at that time, he would unquestionably learn the Greek language. He would be taught to read, by his father, in the Hebrew Bible and to use the Hebrew in the worship of the synagogue.

There are many scholars who maintain that he was a member of the Sanhedrim at the time of the persecution of Stephen. They base their argument upon Acts 26:10, which reads: "**Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them,**" thinking that he voted as part of the Sanhedrim. That he was a member of the Sanhedrim, we cannot be certain, but we are certain from Saul's own words that he gave his approval to this brutal murder. As far as we can learn from the record, the Sanhedrim did not vote to put Stephen to death. The trial was never ended. Before the Sanhedrim had voted the mob took things into their own hands and rushing madly upon him dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. Some, believing that Saul was a member of the Sanhedrim, have endeavored to fix his age, and have declared that he was a married man, since it is said all members of the Sanhedrim must be married men. But this argument is built upon an uncertain premise.

We have, in the foregoing statements, a number of important and definite facts concerning the early life of Saul. From the circumstances which surrounded a youth in the places and at the time where Saul was reared we may learn much which helps us to understand the acquisitions, the prejudices, the knowledge, the observations, the intellect and the zeal which are so apparent in his later life.

HEBREW AND ROMAN

Descendants of the tribe of Benjamin did not forget that their forefather was a favorite son. The hero of that tribe was Saul, the first king of Israel. That the father of Saul of Tarsus was especially proud of his son and expected of him a great career is evident from the name, Saul, which he gave to his son. But Saul's father was also proud of the fact that he was a Roman citizen, so he gave his son a Roman name, Paul.

A GREEK OF TARSUS

Tarsus, the city in which Saul was born, was the capital of the province of Cilicia. The province was under Roman rule and the city of Tarsus had been made a free city by Mark Antony. This was confirmed by Caesar. Tarsus was a city of great commercial, military and educational importance. Saul would therefore see, in his boyhood days ships and caravans from various parts of the world. On the ships he would see figures to represent the gods of the nations from which they came and he would learn something of the religion for which they stood and would be warned by his father against the evils of such idolatry and the immorality which accompanied this false worship. He would learn that from whatever point these ships came they were all under Roman rule and he would be proud that he could say, "*Civis Romanus sum,*" "I am a Roman citizen." As he saw the storks fly over the city every spring toward the north-west and as he asked whence they came and whither they were bound he would learn of their long path from the Nile to the Jordan, along the coast, up through the Cilician Gates in the Taurus mountains, over Iconium and Lystra, on to the cities of the coast by the Aegean Sea, and of their continued flight over islands and sea into far of Macedonia, and to the Danube.

One cannot but wonder whether that boy, as he watched those great stately birds in the spring-time, dreamed that he might one day follow their path out over the Roman road into distant Macedonia. Or when he saw the horses of the Roman post dashing into Tarsus in the evening, all covered with foam, and thought of the long and dangerous road over which they had traveled in relays, did he not perhaps wish that he, some day, might travel over that road to its very end in the imperial city of Rome? He would at least learn much of the great Roman highway toward the west and of the great mountain pass, the Cilician gates, through which all must pass as they journeyed by land toward the west.

Tarsus was located on the river Cnydus, about twelve miles from the sea. The mouth of the river is now choked with mud and sand but it was then widened into a harbor on which were built large docks. As the boy, Saul, saw ships come into the harbor from the sea with sails tattered and torn and heard the sailors tell of the fearful storm through which they had come he may have imagined himself one day on the sea in one of those ships experiencing the thrills of the sailor as the storm drove them helplessly before it. As he helped make cloth for the sails of ships and for the tents of the mountaineers he would not only hear many tales of how that strong cloth had been torn by the winds in the storms on the sea, but he would also hear stories of the trials of the mountaineers and the plainsmen as they were attacked by robbers or as they journeyed into the rugged sections of the north-west.

As he studied his Bible under the tuition of his father, and as he read of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) and Cyrus and their conquests, his father would likely tell him that it was through Tarsus and up the Roman road through the Cilician Gates that Xerxes with his millions of Persian soldiers had tramped on their way toward Greece, and that it was down over that same road, through that same mountain pass, and on eastward through the Syrian Gates that Alexander with his host had marched. He would tell him that now that great highway was maintained and guarded by Roman soldiers so that the Emperor and his army might keep in constant communication with all the widespread territory of the Roman Empire. His father would probably tell him that it would be well for them to have those roads for soon a great King was coming from among the Hebrews who was to rule the world. He would exhort him to be strict in keeping the Hebrew law for only such would be honored by the Messiah when He did come.

ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM

When in the evening, in the spring, a group of weary Jewish travelers stopped before his father's house and sought rest and refreshment for the night, as they were on their way toward Jerusalem to attend the great feast of the Passover, and when his father left with them in the morning, he would be most deeply interested and have many questions to ask why they all went. But a great event in his life would come when, after he was about fourteen years old, he was to go with his father and the group of travelers to attend, and take part in, the ceremonies of this great feast. What would make it a doubly important event in his life was that he was to remain at Jerusalem for a time that he might attend school under the great Rabbi, Gamaliel, whose name he had so often heard and had hoped that he might one day see. It would not be without some sad thoughts that he helped wrap up his figs and clothing in preparation for the journey, for it would not be easy to leave his mother and home to take up his studies in the renowned city of Jerusalem.

As he left home he would not be greatly troubled, as some boys are, lest he should not be able to make a living if he should be cast upon his own responsibilities, for his father had taught him a trade. A noted Jewish Rabbi had said,

“The father who does not teach his son a trade makes him a thief,” and Saul’s father, taking this advice, had taught his son a trade that would be useful, and enable him to make a living wherever he went. He had learned the principle trade of Tarsus, which was called tent-making. The boys who learned this trade were taught how to take the goats’ hair and spin it into thread, to take the thread and weave it into strong cloth and then to take the cloth and sew it into the shape of tents.

As Saul, with his father and their caravan, neared Jerusalem they would see other caravans of travelers coming from every direction and every land. He would watch eagerly for the first glimpse of Mt. Zion and particularly for the temple with its gold gleaming in the sunlight. As they walked up the hill toward Jerusalem Saul would be singing with the rest of the pilgrims the Psalm which was fitted for that occasion:

**“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord,
which made heaven and earth”**

(Psalm 121:1-2)

And as they entered within the gates of the city they would sing:

**“I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go into the house of the Lord.
Our feet shall stand
within thy gates, O Jerusalem”**

(Psalm 122:1-2)

How Saul’s heart would thrill as they saw at close range the magnificent marble steps of the temple and great pillars, the doors covered with gold and the great golden dome. How wonderful it would be as they saw the brazen altar and the smoke rising from it and the priest with his beautiful robes ministering at the altar and the temple.

How he would stop suddenly and look, and read carefully, as he saw before the marble steps of the temple, in Greek letters cut on a slab of stone, these striking words:

**“Let no foreigner enter within the screen and enclosure surrounding the sanctuary.
Whosoever is taken so doing will himself be the cause that death overtaketh him.”**

He was born in a Greek city. Did that sign refer to him? Ah no! He walked proudly by it for his father was a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

Little did he think that he, one day, would be accused of assisting Greeks in the breaking of that command, would be set upon by a mob and charged with disloyalty to the Hebrew religion.

As Saul looked around the city after the hour of worship he would be shocked to see a tower overshadowing the temple. As he asked what it was he would be told: "That is the Roman tower of Antony." "What?" he would ask, "is that tower named for Mark Antony who made my city, Tarsus, free?" The reply would come back, "Do you not know that the Roman soldiers are constantly guarding the temple and the city of Jerusalem to see that no one starts a movement to deliver our capital and our people from the power of the Romans?" Saul's independent spirit would rise in rebellion. He might say little but he would think much of this perpetual insult to the Hebrew people. His wildest imagination would never lead him to think that one day he would stand on the steps of that tower while the mob howled at his feet and threatened to tear him limb from limb, were it not for their fear of the Roman soldiers, while he attempted to vindicate his new faith in their hearing.

TAUGHT BY GAMALIEL

When his father had returned home and he was left to study under the direction of Gamaliel he found that he had a larger task than he had expected to master the many precepts and interpretations of the law. He set himself to master his studies, however, and became one of the best students in the school of Gamaliel. Gamaliel kept emphasizing the fact that the prophets had foretold a golden age for Israel. He told them that the Romans would not always hold them in subjection. He taught them that there was a great King coming who would rule all the nations. "Listen," he would say, "to what the psalmist says:"

**“He shall have dominion also
from sea to sea,
and from the river unto the
ends of the earth.
They that dwell in the wilderness
shall bow before him;
and his enemies shall lick
the dust.

The kings of Tarshish and of the
isles shall bring presents:
the kings of Sheba and Seba
shall offer gifts.
Yea, all kings shall fall down
before him:
all nations shall serve him”**

(Psalm 72:8-11)

Gamaliel would drill his students with the precepts of the law. He would tell them that no one was to lead them to follow any other god. Even their nearest relatives were to be put to death if they attempted to lead them after another god.

**“Thou shalt not consent unto him,
nor hearken unto him;
neither shall thine eye pity him,
neither shalt thou spare,
neither shalt thou conceal him:
But thou shalt surely kill him;
thine hand shall be first upon him
to put him to death,
and afterwards the hand
of all the people.
And thou shalt stone him with stones,
that he die”**

(Deuteronomy 13:8-10)

It is not strange that, after such a teaching, the students of the law who were zealous for its enforcement, if they thought any one was setting before them strange gods, should set about to punish him with death. When Saul helped to lead the mob against Stephen, he evidently thought that he was applying this portion of the law to a heretic who was blaspheming the name of God and introducing new ones. When Saul continued to lay waste the church, to arrest the disciples, to drag them off to prison, and to breathe out threatenings and slaughter against them he thought that he was doing God’s service. When he continued to hound them beyond the borders of Palestine, and was on his way to Damascus to bring them bound back to Jerusalem, it was because he believed that Jesus, whom they preached, was not the MESSIAH, that he was not God but a false Messiah who should be dealt with according to the strict terms of the law.

As we think of Saul the strict Pharisee, the proud Benjamite, the unyielding Hebrew, the zealous Hellenist, the fiery persecutor, in comparison with the devout, consecrated, humble, enduring Paul of later years, we marvel at the power of the grace of God to transform a human heart. He himself said, **“By the grace of God I am what I am,”** and it is manifest that nothing short of the grace of God could work such a transformation.

- He who had been the leader of the persecution was the most enduring of the persecuted.
- He who had persecuted the disciples of Christ to the death was ready to be offered upon the alter for Christ.
- He who had been exceedingly mad against the disciples regarded no honor greater than to be called a disciple.

He could say from the heart the words of the Lord: **“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven”** (Matthew 5:11-12).

THE CHURCH GREW

Saul even while a persecutor was causing the church to grow. He was imprisoning some, but others who were driven from their homes went about preaching the word, and new centers of influence with new groups of Christians began to appear in many cities in Judaea and Samaria and Galilee. We may already see a rapid growth of the church. In Samaria multitudes had listened to Philip, had believed, were baptized and had received the Holy Spirit. The Ethiopian was on his way rejoicing, bearing the glad tidings to far off Ethiopia. Philip had been winning the disciples along the way as he preached in cities on the coast of the Mediterranean and had settled down to evangelize the great and influential city of Caesarea. Peter and John had preached in many villages of Samaria. The disciples were having a large influence of the great Gentile city of Damascus so that the opponents of the Gospel saw that if this new heresy, as they considered it, was to be checked they must arrest its promoters even there, one hundred and forty miles from the city of Jerusalem.

JERUSALEM NO LONGER THE CENTER

Jerusalem henceforth ceased to be the center of action. The Gospel was being carried not only through all Judaea and Samaria, but into all the world. Jesus was continuing to do and to teach, by His Spirit, through His disciples. Saul in his mad zeal thought that he could arrest the influence of Jesus of Nazareth, but He who sits in the heavens laughed at his puny efforts and had them in derision (Psalm 2:4).

We have seen that a great change came over Saul; let us see how and by what power it was brought about.

Saul had made havoc of the church at Jerusalem; he had asked letters of the high priest and of the Sanhedrim, to take to Damascus, to order the members of the synagogues there to seek out, arrest, bind and bring to Jerusalem all Christians. We see Saul represented in pictures as riding upon a horse, but there is nothing to indicate that he was so conveyed. As he and his party neared Damascus, about noon when the Syrian sun was shining with intense brilliancy, all at once there shone round about him a light from Heaven which was brighter than the sun. Saul could not stand in the presence of this great light and fell to the earth. A voice said to him: **“Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”** (9:4).

Those who were with him saw the light and fell to the ground. They also heard a voice but did not discern the words which were spoken. Saul asked: **“Who art thou, Lord?”** (9:6) The Lord replied: **“I am Jesus whom thou persecutest”** (9:6). Saul was told to: **“Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do”** (9:7).

- He who came to arrest was being arrested;
- He who came to give orders was taking orders;
- He who came boldly and defiantly was guided blindly and humbly.
- He who came to cast out the disciples found refuge and strength from disciples.

All who were with him stood by him speechless with astonishment. Saul arose from the earth but still he could see nothing. His companions led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus where he found shelter in the house of Judas on Straight street, the main thoroughfare of the city. He was there three days fasting, without food or drink.

The voice said, as Saul tells us elsewhere, “**it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks**” (9:5). Many have argued from this statement that Saul had been aroused in his conscience by the death of Stephen and that now he was pressing on against his conscience and was at last overwhelmed by it. There was evidently an inward monitor which was not permitting Saul to go forward without some questions in his mind. Still his conscience was not accusing him, as he afterward tells us, and he thought that he was doing God’s service.

Those who assert that Saul was overcome by an accusing conscience are endeavoring to give a natural, rather than a supernatural, explanation of the conversation of Saul. The record will permit of no such explanation. It was a sudden, supernatural power which arrested Saul and struck him to the ground. It was a supernatural light which wrought a supernatural change upon the heart of Saul.

We are not left in doubt as to who caused the light and whose voice it was that spoke. It was Jesus who was continuing to work in the hearts of men. It was the brightness of the glory of Christ, so bright that human eyes could not look upon Him without being blinded. It was a light so bright that it could not shine in the heart of man without imparting to that man the light of life.

JESUS STILL LIVING

The voice said, “**I am Jesus.**” This was the first time that Saul would believe that Jesus was not dead. He had come to tell the people of Damascus that it was folly, utter blasphemy to believe that Jesus was alive, but here was Jesus overpowering him, thrusting him to the ground. He was not looking up but he could see Jesus. He was not bending his ear but he could hear Him speaking, not in a strange language, but in the Hebrew. There was no denying the fact that it was Jesus. Saul was not a man of weak mind given to hallucinations. He was not the kind of man whom men could easily deceive. The power that arrested him was not one which came suddenly and left as suddenly. The One who had arrested him had power to strike him blind with the very brightness of His own person.

Moreover, it was manifestly not an effort of Saul to deceive his companions. When one deceives his friends with the assertion that he has seen and heard something strange he usually deceives them only for a short time. If danger threatens him because of the story which he has told he retracts it at once.

This was not true of Saul. He continued to tell the same story. He told it often in the face of persecution and threatened death. There was nothing more real to Saul that ever occurred in his life than the appearance of Jesus that day on the way to Damascus. There was nothing more important that had ever occurred in his life than that. It changed his whole plan of life; it changed his whole course of life.

PERSECUTING JESUS

The voice said: “**I am Jesus whom thou persecutest**” (9:6). Jesus had stricken him to the ground but not in anger. He did not say, “I have come to settle with you about Stephen, I have come to punish you for your persecution of Peter and John.” What He did say to Saul was firm, yet tender. It was a most revealing statement. It revealed the fact that Jesus is vitally connected with His people and with their sufferings. It revealed the fact that what Jesus had said was absolutely true, “When they persecute you, that persecute me.” It revealed the fact that Saul in his mad career was set, not merely against some of the professed followers of Christ whom he had known or heard of in Jerusalem, but that he was fighting against Jesus Himself.

All down through the centuries it has been true that they who rise up against the disciples of Christ, set themselves against Christ and His almighty power. The scene which took place many centuries after the days of Paul on the coast of Scotland returns to our mind. Margaret Wilson, a girl of eighteen, and Margaret McLaughlin, a widow of sixty-three, were being persecuted to the death. While the tide was out two stakes were driven into the sand of the sea-shore. To the one farthest out Margaret McLaughlin was tied, while to the stake closer in Margaret Wilson was secured. They were to die with drowning as the tide came in. As the tide slowly rose and at last covered over the head of the aged woman, Margaret Wilson witnessed the death struggle of her companion in suffering. A cruel soldier said to her: “What think you now of your companion?” She bravely replied: “What do I see but Christ, in one of His members, wrestling there? Think you that we are sufferers? No, it is Christ in us; for He sends none a warfaring on their own charges.” Major Windram and his troopers were persecuting, not merely Margaret Wilson and Margaret McLaughlin; they were persecuting Christ.

IN DAMASCUS

Saul had been accustomed to fast as a Pharisee, but he had never engaged in a fast like that before. He was three days without sight and did neither eat or drink. He was three days without food, but not three days without thought. The bright mind of Saul must have been very active. When Jonah disobeyed God and was three days within the whale we know that he prayed much and thought seriously. No doubt Saul did the same. From the prayer which Jonah uttered he evidently thought of many passages of Scripture, meditated upon them, and used parts of them in his prayer to God. Doubtless Saul did the same. We are told distinctly that he was engaged in prayer: “**And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth**” (9:11).

He would think of the letters which he had received from the chief priest and wish he had never seen them. He would think of his cruelty to Stephen and others and wish that he might be forgiven, for he had found that they were right and he was wrong. He would think of the many passages which he had learned when a boy and under the teaching of Gamaliel concerning the Messiah and he would see a new meaning in them. Peter had found their meaning. Saul had like heard some of Peter’s interpretations of Scripture. He had a better training than Peter and doubtless knew as many or more passages.

He would understand now how they spoke of Jesus. He was say to himself, “He lives, he is all-powerful, he could smite me down to the ground. No doubt he did arise from the tomb as His disciples assert, He must have ascended as they declare for He spoke to me from the throne.” Undoubtedly that would not be a fast such as Isaiah condemns when he said the people cry to God and He would not hear; it would be a time of earnest, sincere, heartfelt confession of sin. He would not repeat the proud prayer of the Pharisee but would cry out as did the Publican, “**Lord be merciful to me a sinner!**”

When the Lord Jesus comes into our hearts by His Spirit He can change them, and change them suddenly. It was not merely a change of environment in the case of Saul, it was not merely more knowledge that he had received, it was not merely a different mental attitude, it was a fundamental transformation of heart that had taken place in Saul. He would soon be telling the world of it and telling them that he was a totally different man after Christ had appeared to him on that memorable day. That which would astonish the people of Damascus, Jerusalem and the Christians everywhere, more than any miracle which they had seen, was the change of heart that had taken place in their arch-enemy, Saul.

THE LORD STILL WORKING

Does the Lord work in the hearts of men with such power still? Can He transform the hearts of men of the world today?

Who that has read of the transformation that came over Augustine can doubt that He can change men still?

Who that knows of the change which came into the heart of Luther can doubt the Lord’s power?

Who that has read of the change that came into the heart of John Bunyan can doubt the wonderful power of Christ to regenerate men?

Who that has read of the worldly pleasure-seeking Adoniram Judson in comparison with the ardent, loving, long-suffering missionary can doubt the power of God to make new the hearts of men?

Who that has read of the change that came over Lord Lyttleton after he studied the life of Saul to prove that his alleged conversion was a myth, transforming an avowed atheist into a devout believer, can doubt that God will works marvelous changes in the hearts of men.

Who that has read of the changes which came over the life of Sadhu Sundar Singh, when a heathen devotee attracted by the wealth and honors of the world gladly left all to walk with Christ and follow Him amidst poverty and persecution, can doubt that God is not only able to change the heart but support those in a wonderful manner whom He has changed?

Who that has read of the change that came into the life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon and made him a marvelous preacher of Christ can doubt that he was given new life from the Lord?

Who that has knowledge of the change that came over Charles T. Studd, transforming a young man of wealth who had been given to all the pleasures of the world into a devoted missionary who was ready to give up all earthly possessions and bury himself in the heart of Africa far from civilization, can doubt that God still works mightily in the hearts of men and gives them great commissions to the dark places of the world and the farthest ends of the earth?

The proof is complete!
The evidence is abundant!
There is no excuse for the doubter!

- If you will not believe the record of Moses and the prophets,
- If you will not accept the record of the Gospel,
- If you will not heed the message of Paul,
- If you will not be convinced by the power of the Spirit working
- through the church in the world in all the ages,

If you will not admit the great mass of evidence which has accumulated with all the history of the Christian church.

If you will not recognize the voice of all the multitude of the saints of God.

THEN YOU WILL NOT BE CONVINCED THOUGH ONE SHOULD RISE FROM THE DEAD OR BE STRICKEN DOWN AS WAS SAUL IN YOUR VERY PRESENCE!

Jesus has risen!
He is ever living!
He is speaking to you today!

Will you not hear Him?
Will you not believe Him?
Will you not obey Him?

Merely to state some of the permanent lessons of this passage will be sufficient. They have already been emphasized.

1. Persecution cannot destroy the church. If there ever was a time when persecution might succeed it was when the Christian church was young. It did not succeed then, when led by a brilliant minded man who worked persistently and violently. There is no danger that it shall ever be permitted of God to cut off the church which he loves. God turns the efforts of the persecutors to promote His cause. The church is purified, the dross is taken away. The members are scattered and new centers of Christian preaching and missionary effort are opened.

2. God in His providence fits men for the work which He plans. It is evident to us as we look back upon the history of the early church that God was preparing Saul to fill one of the most important places that any man has ever filled in His Church.

A man who was to be used, as Saul was, to write about half of the New Testament and in it to enlarge upon the great doctrines which Christ wished to make plain to His people, needed a splendid Biblical and mental training. A man who was to serve in such a wide capacity as missionary needed the training which he had as Hebrew, Greek and Roman. As we look over the lives of God's servants all through the ages, and at present, we can see how wonderfully in His providence, He has fitted them for the work which they were to do. We can see this fact exemplified in the lives of Robert Moffatt, David Livingstone, William Carey, John Calvin, Matthew Henry, Alexander Henderson, John G. Paton, Hudson Taylor, Robert Dick Wilson and a host of others whom God has used wonderfully in His service.

3. The Spirit of God can make new the most hardened heart. We think of the Pharisee as an extremely hard man to influence with the Gospel. These were the men who led in the crucifixion of Christ. Saul was one of the strictest of the Pharisees, yet the Holy Spirit could transform his heart completely. He has, in every age, manifested his power to transform the hearts of men and women who have been hardened in sin.

4. Regeneration is a sudden transformation of the heart. There are few instances where the outward evidence is so clear as in the case of Saul, yet in every heart that has been made new there has been a sudden as well as entire change.

5. No man can stand in the presence of God's glory. The glory of Christ was above the brightness of the sun and blinded Saul. The glorious appearance of the glorified Christ is described in the first chapter of Revelation as well as it is possible for us to understand. His glory is beyond our comprehension.

6. God can work with means, without means, or against means. He worked without means in the conversion of Saul. He used means to instruct him. We frequently hear men assert that God cannot do certain things without human means. He usually uses men as His instruments, but it is well for us to remember that God can work without means if He so chooses. He could cause the stones to cry out "Hosanna!", if the people did not.

7. The Grace of God is beyond our comprehension. Saul was persecuting in a terrible manner. He says: "**And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities**" (Acts 26:11). God was wonderful in His grace, mercy and tenderness in dealing with him. He was so with Manasseh, He was so with the thief on the cross, He was so with Augustine, He is always wonderful in His grace.

QUESTIONS (Acts 9:1-9)

1. What was Saul's nationality? His birthplace?
2. Of what tribe was Saul?
3. To what Jewish sect did Saul belong?
4. What noted man was his teacher?

5. What was his relationship to Greece and Rome?
6. What in Saul's training accounts for his actions?
7. What was the result of Saul's persecution upon the growth of the church?
8. Where was Saul bound for in this passage?
9. How did he arrive differently than he expected?
10. Whose voice and power arrested him?
11. What was the question put to him?
12. What was Saul's question in return?
13. What was the Lord's reply?
14. Did Saul ever doubt that Jesus was alive after that? Should we?
15. Was Saul ready to do what the Lord told him? Should every convert?
16. What was Saul's physical condition?
17. What was his spiritual condition?
18. What was the nature of his fast?
19. What assurance have we that the Lord can work with men today as He worked with Saul?
20. What place had the will of Saul in his conversion? What place the grace of God?

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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