

LESSON 21 – SAUL’S AMAZING CONVERSION

Acts 8 and 9

THEME: To present the call of Christ to service.

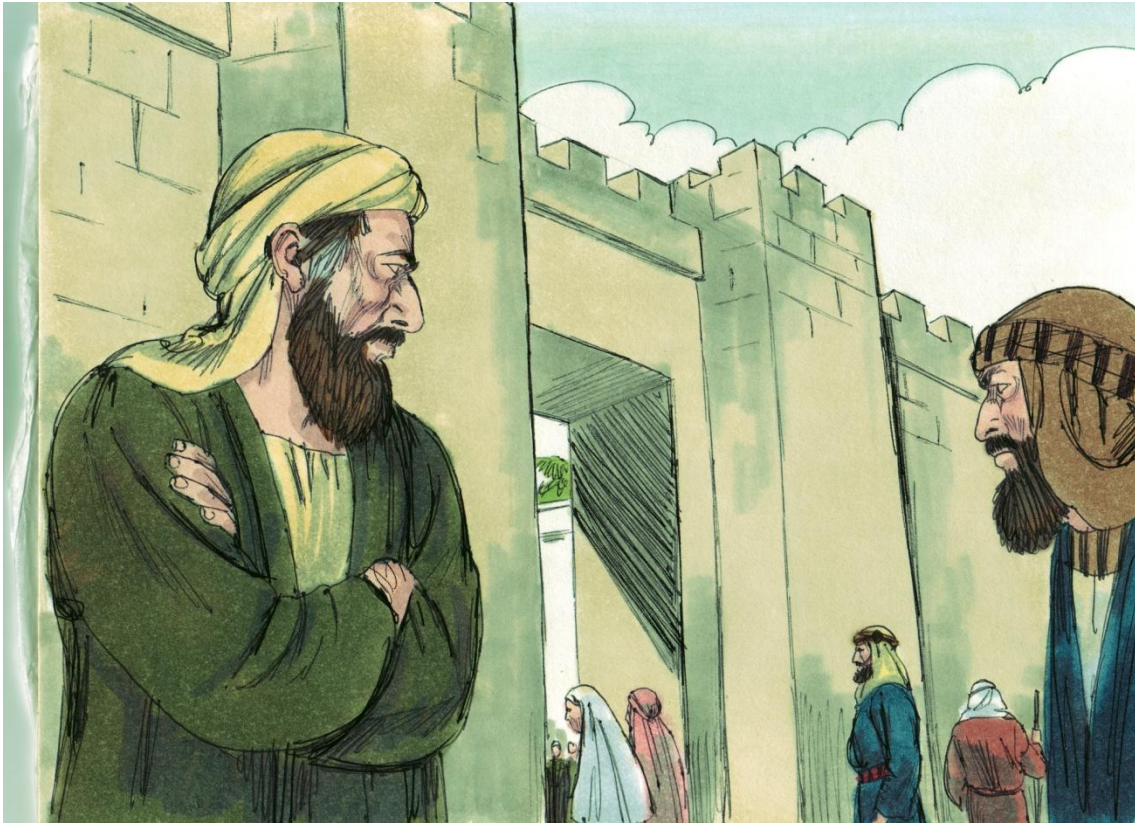
Before we begin our journey today, we must look back at CONFUSION CORNERS. Back there mankind gave up God, so God in turn gave them up. Romans 1:24-28. Then He chose one man, Abram, to begin an entirely new dealing with men. Genesis 12:1-3. Mankind turned away to GENTILE BYWAY. Only Abram followed God on PROMISE ROAD. Acts 7:2-4. This lesson begins on KINGDOM HIGHWAY, and now we will see how Israel continues to reject God’s offer of the Kingdom and how God called out a *new* apostle, so not one of the 12 apostles, to begin something totally new for both Jew and Gentile.

When Stephen was being stoned, there was a man standing nearby guarding the robes of those throwing the stones. His name was Saul. Acts 7:58. Saul was a born Hebrew of the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5) and a native of Tarsus (Acts 9:11), the capital city in the Roman province of Cilicia. So he was both a Hebrew and a Roman. He was brought up in Jerusalem, educated under Gamaliel. Acts 22:3. He was a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6) and in hearty agreement with putting Stephen to death. And on the day of Stephen’s death a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and its believers were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, putting them in prison. Acts 8:1-3.

But then we read about Saul ‘s amazing conversion on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:1-16. The Lord tells Ananias in Damascus: “Go to Saul, 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 9:15. Thus Saul is chosen as the one to bear the Lord’s name among the Gentiles, kings and the sons of Israel. Then too, he is chosen to suffer, to suffer many things for the Lord’s name. Saul had a special ministry of suffering, but he later wrote that he counted it as a privilege to suffer for Christ’s sake. Philippians 1:29. How about you? Do you consider it a privilege to suffer for Christ’s sake?

Immediately Saul began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus, saying “He is the Son of God.” All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?” But Saul kept confounding the Jews by proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Acts 9:20-22.

The unbelieving Jews were not going to receive the testimony of Saul. The Bible says in Acts 9:23 that after “many days” they plotted together to do away with him. The phrase “many days” is quite elastic enough to make up the three years in which Saul went away to Arabia. During those years he was receiving revelations from the risen Jesus Christ concerning the new gospel which he was to proclaim. Galatians 1:11-17. The plot of the Jews became known to Saul. Though they watched the city gates night and day to kill him, Saul’s disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket. Acts 9:24-25.



Source: Sweet Publishing - for illustration purposes of Acts 9:24 only

When Saul came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas, a Levite of Cyprian birth, took hold of Saul and brought him to the apostles. From Galatians 1:19 we learn that all the apostles were away except Peter and James, the Lord’s brother. James was not one of the twelve, but he held a position in Jerusalem comparable to that of an apostle. Barnabas described to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road on the road to Damascus, and that he had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

It was on the road to Damascus that Saul first saw the glorified Lord and heard those tender words, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" But not only did the Lord reveal Himself *to Saul* from heaven, He revealed Himself *to the world* through Paul, the latin name of Saul. In Galatians 1:12, he says he got his message "by a revelation of Jesus Christ," but in verses 15 and 16 he says that it pleased God, "TO REVEAL HIS SON IN ME." What a revelation to the world and to Israel when God saved Saul, His blaspheming enemy! He did it to show that He wanted all to be reconciled, "that He may show mercy to all" (Romans 11:32). The Beloved Son had been rejected but God postponed the day of judgment and instead revealed Christ in matchless grace, through the conversion of the foremost of sinners.

Now that Saul had seen Christ and tasted of the riches of His grace, he was a new man. Even before God he was a new man, for God did not behold him as the wicked blasphemer and murderer, but viewed him now *in Christ*, who had died in his place (2 Corinthians 5:17). And not only was Paul now *in Christ*, but *Christ was in Paul!* Paul says in Galatians 1:15,16: "...God...was pleased TO REVEAL HIS SON IN ME."

Christ once died in Paul's stead. Now Paul stands in Christ's stead, pleading with sinners to be reconciled to God. It is as if he said: "Christ could not be here. You didn't want Him. But I am here in His place." See 2 Corinthians 5:20: "We beg you ON BEHALF OF CHRIST, be reconciled to God." This is doubtless what Paul had in mind when he said "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His Body, that is, the church." Colossians 1:24. Christ's *vicarious* suffering was over and the moment was there to judge this wicked world. But instead of that He said to the chief persecutor: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And from then on Saul the persecutor became Saul the persecuted, and he bore it gladly to show forth the grace of the rejected Christ. He called it "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10), and "filling up" that which remained of the afflictions of Christ.

Paul, the new man in Christ, reminds us of the "one new man" God is now forming of reconciled Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14-16). Paul is the pattern. Like Paul, we too stand before God in Christ, "complete in Him" (Colossians 2:10), because He died in our stead. And as we stand before God *in Christ*, so Christ stands before the world *in us*, as we beg men "on behalf of Christ" to be reconciled to God. And so God still reveals His Son to the world through sinners saved by grace.

MEMORY VERSE: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:20.

LESSON 21 – WORK SHEET

1. Back at the tower of Babel called CONFUSION CORNERS on our chart, something happened to the Gentiles because they rebelled against God. See what it was by looking up the following Scriptures:

Romans 1:24: _____.

Romans 1:26: _____.

Romans 1:28: _____.

2. Stephen said that Israel was guilty of what three things? Acts 7:51-52.

You are always _____.

Your _____ announced the coming of the Righteous One. They were now the _____ and _____ of Christ.

3. Israel quickly becomes as bad as the Gentiles, so God prepares to do a new thing. His first step is to conclude or shut up all _____ that He may _____ all. Romans 11:32.

4. The man at whose feet the killers laid their robes while they stoned Stephen was _____. Acts 7:58.

5. Christ told Ananias that Saul was to bear His name to three groups of people. Name them. Acts 9:15-16. _____.

6. Not only was Paul now *in Christ*, but *Christ was in Paul*! Paul says in Galatians 1:15,16: _____.

7. God spoke to Saul from Heaven. How does He speak to us who live over at GRACE AIRPORT? Romans 10:17. _____.

8. What is an AMBASSADOR? Look up the word in a dictionary and write a brief definition. _____.

9. According to 2 Corinthians 5:20, what should we be doing? _____.

10. Write 2 Corinthians 5:20: _____

