

THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN SAUL AND THE LORD: A LIFE-CHANGING CONVERSION ACTS 09:01–09

Introduction

Saul of Tarsus, the arch-persecutor of the Lord and His followers, was soon to become Paul, the great apostle to the world (Gentiles). From this point on in the Book of Acts, and in fact in all the New Testament, Paul becomes the dominant servant of the Lord. From all indications, only the Lord Himself superseded the dedication of this man, a man who had been forgiven so much, even the slaughter of great numbers of God's people (see Acts 9:1; 22:4; 26:10). His life and ministry hold so many lessons for the believer, it is impossible to cover even a smattering in one footnote. For this reason, it is not even being attempted. Instead, the major features of his life are being covered in the passages where they are mentioned. The present passage covers Saul's confrontation with the Lord. It is an excellent study on conversion. Paul recounts his testimony twice. (See Acts 22: 6-16; 26:12-18.)

- I. There was his former life: a flaming fury against Christ and His disciples (vv. 1-2).
- II. There was the light from heaven (v. 3).
- III. There was the confrontation with the Lord (vv. 4-6).
- IV. There were the witnesses to the event (v. 7).
- V. There was obedience (vv. 8-9).

I. Acts 09:01–02 Paul, the Persecutor

There was Saul's former life; he was the arch-persecutor of the church. He burned with a flaming fury against Christ and His disciples. Two facts show this. (See notes, Acts 8:1-4.)

1. Saul was consumed with a fierce anger and wrath against Christ and His disciples. He was "breathing out murderous threats." The words "breathing out" in the Greek are really *breathing in* (inhaling). The picture is that of Saul *breathing in*, taking into his heart the evil of destroying Christ and His disciples. Of course, what is in the heart is what comes out. Saul actually hunted down and slaughtered believers — many of them (see Acts 8:3).
 2. Saul was given over to a fierce objective, that of destroying all the followers of "the Way" of the Lord.
 - a. He volunteered — actually went to the High Priest and the Sanhedrin requesting authority to storm after the fleeing believers — to arrest and bring the believers back to Jerusalem for trial (see Acts 22:5; 26:10).
 - b. He included women as well as men (see Acts 8:3). (See *Persecution of Church*, Acts 8:3.)
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ACTS 09:02

“THE WAY”, CHRISTIANITY, JESUS CHRIST, TEACHINGS

The believers of the early church were known as followers of “the Way” (see Acts, 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Note the teachings of the Lord were not pictured as a religion or a set of principles, or as rules and regulations, but as...

- a way of life
- a course of life
- a means of life
- a condition of life
- a kind of life
- an experience of life

Note also the following titles or names given to Christ and His teachings.

=> The Way of Salvation (Acts 16:17).

=> The Way of the Lord (Acts 18:25).

=> The Way of Peace (Lk. 1:79; Rom. 3:17).

=> The Way of Truth (2 Pet. 2:2).

=> The Way of Righteousness (2 Pet. 2:21). □

II. Acts 09:03 *Light from Heaven*

There was the light from heaven. Note: it was while Saul was set on his murder of believers that he was stricken down by the light from the Lord. It was in the midst of his ferocious evil that he was saved. (There is hope for all, for anyone of us.) (See Acts 26:12-18 for more facts.)

1. The light appeared suddenly, out of nowhere, unexpectedly.
2. The light was from heaven. It was supernatural and miraculous, from God Himself. God is the source and giver of the light.
3. The light was great, that is, brighter than the noonday sun (Acts 22:6; 26:13. Imagine a light so bright it actually outshines the sun!) When it burst forth, Saul saw the Lord standing in the midst of it (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). The light radiated from the Lord Himself.
=> “[Jesus’] face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light” (Mt. 17:2; see note, Mt. 17:2).
=> “God is light” (1 Jn. 1:5).
=> “[God]...lives in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16).
=> “[God] who wraps Himself in light as with a garment” (Psa. 104:2).
4. The light and sight of the heavenly figure struck Paul to the ground. (See Acts 26:14 where Paul says that all the others with him fell to the earth as well.)

Thought 1. Now note what Scripture proclaims to all hearts. Light, the very presence of God Himself, is the *first thing* experienced in salvation.

2 Cor 4:6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

God has to shine in a man’s heart for a man to be saved; he has to give the knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Lord of heaven, the Son of God Himself. God’s very own glory dwells in Jesus Christ. Therefore, for a man to know God’s glory, he must know the face of Jesus Christ. He must receive light, the knowledge, the understanding, the awareness, the consciousness, the quickening that Jesus is the Saviour, the Son of God Himself.

John 1:4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

2 Cor 4:6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Eph 5:14 For it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Isa 9:2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

III. Acts 09:04–06 Conversion of Paul

There was the confrontation with the Lord. He heard a voice speak to him. Note: he alone heard the voice. The others heard a sound, but could not distinguish the words (v. 7). The message was a personal message to Paul alone.

1. There was the charge of terrible sin, of opposing and persecuting the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus called Saul by his name, “Saul, Saul.” Calling the name twice shows two things.
 - a. It shows tenderness, love and concern, an appeal to listen and heed.
 - b. It shows rebuke and warning. Saul was treading on dangerous ground. He was close to the brink, about to fall over the edge of no recovery. Opposing Christ is serious, so serious it dooms a person to hell unless there is repentance.

Thought 1. Note how Christ identifies with the believer. The person who opposes the believer is opposing Christ Himself (Mt. 25:40, 45).

2. There was the request to know the Lord. Saul knew that the light and the person seen in the midst of the light and the voice had all come from heaven. He knew that he was being confronted by a heavenly being. But who was the heavenly being? Saul — stricken down, humbled, convicted, frightened — cried out in desperation, “Who are you, Lord?” He knew...
 - it was the Lord, the heavenly being
 - it was the Lord he was supposed to know

This he confessed. But he did *not* know Him. He cried out, “Who are you, Lord? Tell me. Identify yourself. Let me know you.”

Thought 1. A man often *knows and confesses* that it is the Lord who is dealing with him; yet he does not know the Lord, not really, not personally. He has to cry out, “Who are you, Lord? Tell me, show me who You are!”

3. The shattering truth is a real eye-opener to every person who opposes Jesus (or God).
 - a. Jesus is the Lord, the One whom the sinner is opposing. (See *Lord*, Acts 2:36.) This truth shattered Saul, broke him in utter submission. Why? Because it meant...
 - that every stone thrown at Stephen was a stone thrown against God Himself (Acts 7:59-60).
 - that every home he had stormed into was a home that truly worshipped God (Acts 8:3).
 - that every person he had forcibly dragged through the streets to jail was a true follower of God (Acts 8:3).
 - that every woman he had abused was a child of God (Acts 8:3; 9:2; 22:4).
 - that everyone he had chained and imprisoned was a true servant of God (Acts 8:3; 22:4; 26:10).
 - that every synagogue he had stormed was the true house of God (Acts 26:11).
 - that every believer he had tracked down and persecuted was a true believer (Acts 22:5; 26:11).
 - that every person whom he had killed (murdered, v. 1), was a charge of murder against him (Acts 26:10; 22:4).
 - that he was lost, truly lost, separated from God and doomed to hell.
 - that his life was a total wreck, being totally deceived and misdirected, bent on utter destruction.
 - that he stood no chance of escaping the guilt of his sin and the doom of hell *apart from the greatest act of mercy ever shown by God*. (See 1 Ti. 1:16.)
- (See Acts 4:2-4: *Religionists*, Mt. 12:10 for the reason Saul opposed Jesus so fiercely.)

Thought 1. When a person really sees that he has been rebelling against God Himself, the Saviour of the universe, he is shattered, utterly shattered. He realizes just what Paul did...

- that he has been opposing God Himself
- that his sin has been against God Himself
- that he is lost, truly lost, separated from God and doomed to hell
- that his life is a total wreck, being totally deceived and misdirected, bent on utter destruction

- that he stands no chance of escaping the guilt of his sin and the doom of hell *apart* from the greatest act of mercy ever shown by God

Mat 23:33 *“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?”*

Rom 2:3 *So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?*

Heb 2:3 *How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.*

Heb 12:25 *See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?*

Jer 11:11 *Therefore this is what the Lord says: ‘I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape. Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them.’*

Amos 9:2 *Though they dig down to the depths of the grave, from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down.*

- b. The Lord commanded him: “Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do. (v. 6)” Note that God did not answer Saul, not right then.

⇒ Saul could not bear it. He was a shattered man. He needed time for prayer and meditation, for straightening out his mind and for assurance from the Spirit of God now dwelling within him.

⇒ Saul needed the maturing witness and contact and companionship of another believer. It was going to take the testimony of a mature believer that Saul had been converted and undergone a radical change for the Christian community to accept him.

Mat 10:32 *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.”*

Luke 12:8 *“I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God.”*

Rom 10:9-10 *That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

1 John 2:23 *No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*

1 John 4:15 *If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.*

IV. Acts 09:07 *Spiritual Dullness*

There were the witnesses to the event. But note they were not privileged to know what was really happening. They were a type of the worldly who saw the miracle of conversion, of God's marvellous grace, yet they never opened their own minds and hearts...

- to see the light of the Lord
- to hear the voice of God
- to confront the Lord
- to call upon the Lord, surrendering to obey Him

Luke 12:56 *"Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?"*

John 8:43 *"Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say."*

Acts 28:27 *For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.*

Rom 3:11 *There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.*

2 Cor 3:14 *But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.*

Eph 4:18 *They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.*

2 Cor 4:4 *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Heb 5:11 *We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.*

V. Acts 09:08–09 *Saul's Obedience*

There was obedience. Saul did just what the Lord told him: he arose and went into the city. But note several facts.

1. His eyes had been closed during the whole traumatic experience.
2. His eyes were now blinded for three days. He was helpless and had to be completely led about by others.
3. His mind would now be shut up in the world of thought alone. He would be left alone...

- to continue praying over his terrible shame
- to learn and know beyond question that the Lord had confronted him. Remember: he had three days for the experience to sink in
- to think through the confrontation with the Lord
- to wonder what changes there would be in his life now
- to switch his mind and his thought patterns, his purpose in life from the past life of religion to the present life with Christ
- to wonder why Jesus was choosing him, the one who had so fiercely opposed the Lord
- to wonder what Jesus wanted with him and what Jesus was going to tell him to do

Note that Paul was unable to eat or drink for three days. The trauma drained all his strength, completely exhausted him.

Mat 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*

John 7:17 *“If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”*

John 14:23 *Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”*

Psa 32:4 *For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*

Psa 42:5-6 *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar.*

Psa 119:28 *My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word. ■*