

This chapter describes the amazing conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a man who aggressively persecuted the early church. God truly made him a “new creature” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) because Saul was transformed from a hater of the gospel to a zealous preacher of it. In fact, Saul (Paul) became one of the most vocal advocates of Jesus Christ and wrote most of the New Testament.

1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” – After taking time to briefly document the ministry of Philip, Luke returns to the topic of Saul, who is still aggressively persecuting believers of Jesus Christ. The expression “breathing out” implies that much of Saul’s breath was spent in expressing threats of imprisonment or death to anyone following Jesus Christ. He was “yet” doing this, implying that he did not want to stop until he had eradicated the worship of Jesus Christ from the face of the earth.

“went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues” – Saul had chased most of the early church out of Jerusalem and apparently a significant number of them had fled to Damascus. Saul evidently not only wanted to eradicate the church from Jerusalem but from everywhere else, so he made plans to go to Damascus to deal with the Christian believers there. He asked the high priest for letters that would authorize him to enlist the help of the synagogues in Damascus to accomplish this purpose.

“that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” – With the help of the Jews from the synagogues of Damascus, he would arrest any “of this way” (followers of Jesus) that they could find and bring them back to Jerusalem to stand before the Sanhedrin council for punishment.

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus” – With the letters in hand that he had requested from the high priest, Saul was on his way to Damascus to do as he had planned. As Saul was approaching Damascus, however, God intervenes and changes his life forever.

“and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth” – Later, when Saul (Paul) was giving his testimony to king Agrippa, he describes the light as occurring at midday and being brighter than the sun (Acts 26:13). Saul fell to the ground as a result of being surprised by the suddenness and blinding brightness of the light and the voice from heaven. Some commentators suggest that the brightness of the light was a manifestation of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

“and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” – Saul’s primary purpose in life over the recent days and weeks had been persecuting believers in Jesus Christ. Now Saul is being confronted by a voice saying “Why are you persecuting me?” Not only does this show that Jesus identifies with those who are His, but it also reveals the true target of Saul’s persecution: Jesus. **John 15:18** (Jesus, speaking to his disciples) “*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*” **Matt. 25:40** “*And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*”

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

“And he said, Who art thou, Lord [kurios: someone in control]?” – The Greek word for “Lord” used by Paul is a general word referring to anyone in power or control of property or situation. While this word is often used in the NT to refer to God, it could also be used of a ruler or owner of a piece of property. Saul seems to be unsure of Who is claiming to be the target of his persecutions, so he uses a respectful title when replying to this voice.

“And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” – The voice identifies Himself as Jesus and also identifies Himself as the target of Saul’s persecution. The target of Saul’s persecutions was against Jesus, but since Jesus was no longer within reach, he persecuted Christ’s followers.

“it is hard [rough; violent] for thee to kick against the pricks [goads]” – A goad was a pointed stick made of wood or iron that was used to urge stubborn livestock to move along. Poking a cow in the hindquarters, for instance, would urge the animal to move along but kicking against the goad was pointless and even self-destructive for the animal. Jesus had been using spiritual goads to move Saul along toward salvation but Saul is only hurting himself if he resists God’s will. **Gal. 1:15** (Paul, speaking of God’s mercy to him in salvation) “*But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace...*”

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

“And he trembling and astonished [amazed; terrified] said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” – The realization of Who Jesus truly is setting in and now Saul becomes afraid because he has been persecuting and even killing the followers of Jesus. No doubt he is considering the real possibility of facing the wrath of God and so he surrenders himself to Jesus’ will, asking what he should do.

“And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” – The Lord sends Saul into the city to await further instructions, perhaps to give him time for serious introspection before He sends another man (Ananias) to help reveal His will to Saul (vs. 10-17). Jesus apparently initiated this encounter with Saul just a short distance from the city (v. 3) so that Saul would not have to blindly travel a long distance.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

These men had been rendered speechless by what they were witnessing. Paul’s later testimony in Acts 22:9 said that the men with him saw the light but did not hear the voice but that can be explained by comparing this experience to the time when God the Father responded to Jesus audibly (John 12:28-29). When the Father promised to glorify His Son, some bystanders thought that they heard thunder. They had heard the sound but did not recognize it as a voice. These men with Saul may have heard the sound without recognizing it as a voice.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus.

“And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man” – God chose to allow the brightness of the light to physically blind Saul. Perhaps God wanted Saul to have time in the seclusion of his own thoughts to consider the import of what he has just experienced. No doubt this was a humbling experience since God had brought Saul’s vendetta against the church to a sudden halt.

“but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus” – Saul’s blindness made him helpless and he needed his traveling companions to lead him into the city of Damascus and into a house to rest.

Verses 9-16: For the next three days Saul resided in Damascus, blind and refusing to eat. He apparently was fasting while he spent the time in prayer (v. 11). The Lord then spoke to a local disciple in Damascus, named Ananias, and commanded him to go seek out Saul of Tarsus and lay his hands on him so that his sight could be restored. Ananias was reluctant because he knew what Saul had done to the church in Jerusalem and what he had come to Damascus to do. However, the Lord stated that Saul was his chosen vessel to bring the gospel to Gentiles, kings and Israel, and that he would suffer great things for the name of Jesus Christ.

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him” – Assured by the Lord, Ananias obeys and goes to the street called “Straight” and inquires at the house of Judas for Saul of Tarsus (v. 11). Once he found Saul, Ananias lays his hands on him.

“said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest” – Ananias welcomes Saul as a brother in the Lord and independently confirms that the One that appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus was indeed the Lord Jesus Christ.

“hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” – He announces that Jesus has sent him to lay hands on Saul so that he could regain his sight. The Holy Ghost has already been at work in Saul’s life, leading him to salvation and then infilling him when he believed (**Rom. 8:9** “*But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*”). Ananias is speaking of the filling of the Spirit for service as an apostle.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.
19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

“And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith [*immediately*]” – It is useless to speculate what this scale-like material was that fell from Saul’s eyes, but he was immediately able to see again once they were removed from his eyes.

“and arose, and was baptized” – Saul had been fasting for three days (v. 9) but the first thing he did was get baptized in the name of Jesus.

“And when he had received meat, he was strengthened” – After his baptism, Saul was willing to eat and regain his physical strength.

“Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus” – Apparently Ananias introduced Saul to the disciples that resided there at Damascus and he fellowshiped with them for an undetermined number of days. These were the same people that he had come to Damascus to arrest and now he was one of them. They may have begun to educate him about Jesus Christ.

20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

Obviously all doubts had evaporated and he was now convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. He immediately began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

21 But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

Knowing that not long before Saul had been focused on destroying the church and had come specifically to Damascus to arrest Christians, these people hearing Saul preaching the gospel that he previously hated were completely amazed at the transformation (Gal. 1:23).

22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

“But Saul increased the more in strength” – He was growing spiritually and gaining better understanding of the OT scriptures that prophesied of Jesus Christ.

“and confounded [*confused; perplexed*] the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ” – The Jews did not want to accept that Jesus was the Christ (the Messiah) but they could not contradict the OT scriptures that Saul used to prove that Jesus was indeed the Christ.

23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: 24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

Eventually these Jews resorted to the same strategy they used with Stephen and Jesus: if you can’t beat him, kill him. However, when Saul learned that they planned to kill him, he apparently took steps to avoid giving them an opportunity to carry out their plans. Since Damascus was a walled city, the gates were the only means of leaving the city. Thus they were watching the gates in the hopes of seeing Saul leave so that they could follow, catch him alone and kill him.

25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket.

The other disciples in Damascus wanted to save Saul’s life, so they helped him escape the city under cover of darkness. They knew that the Jews were watching the gates so they lowered Saul over the city wall in a basket.