

SIXTH CASE OF CONVERSION

SAUL of TARSUS

Lesson Seventeen

INTRODUCTION:

With this lesson-study, we come to the half-way mark in our investigation of the CASES of CONVERSION as recorded in Acts. From this lesson onward, we can all enjoy that psychological lift we call derive from realizing we are NEARING THE COMPLETION of a worth-while undertaking. And surely, we must all agree that our KNOWLEDGE of GOD'S WORD has been GREATLY ENHANCED through a study of this nature.

From our study of the third, fourth and fifth cases of conversion (in Acts 8), we gleaned considerable information about our subject in hand. From the case of the SAMARITANS, we learned that Philip's teaching caused them to BELIEVE and be BAPTIZED (v.12). From the case of SIMON, the SORCERER, we learned that he himself ALSO BELIEVED and was BAPTIZED (v.13). And from the case of the ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH, we learned that Philip's preaching led him, ALSO, to BELIEVE and be BAPTIZED (v.35-39).

The constant association of BOTH BELIEF AND BAPTISM is too persistent in the cases of conversion that we have studied thus far for EITHER belief OR baptism to be merely ACCIDENTAL or INCIDENTAL (as some would have us believe concerning baptism). The same word of God that teaches ONE likewise teaches the OTHER – and for the SAME PURPOSE. Moreover, as we learned in an earlier study of the GREAT COMMISSION, Jesus Christ HIMSELF, in sending out the apostles THEMSELVES commanded that it be TAUGHT, PREACHED AND DONE THIS WAY.

Several points were outstanding from our study especially of the ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH'S conversion:

1. He SOUGHT baptism EAGERLY rather than having to be PERSUADED:
2. Philip taught him that BELIEF must PRECEDE baptism (which necessarily would exclude all from being baptized who are mentally incapable of belief, e.g., infants, insane, animals, etc.);
3. The eunuch confessed his FAITH in Christ, not his sins, prior to baptism;
4. The eunuch's baptism involved both Philip and himself going DOWN INTO THE WATER, his being BAPTIZED, then both of them coming UP OUT OF THE WATER. (From Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12, which DESCRIBES baptism, we conclude that a BURIAL (immersion) must have taken place there, which harmonizes with the description given. Ephesians 4:5 teaches "ONE baptism". If that "ONE" is a BURIAL in water, then what SCRIPTURAL reason exists for those TWO other SO-CALLED "baptisms", i.e., SPRINKLING and POURING! Not a shred of BIBLE evidence exists for EITHER; and both are contrary to the clear teaching of the new testament ALL THE WAY THROUGH, as well as the example of the eunuch;
5. Lastly, the eunuch's rejoicing was AFTER (not before) he was baptized.

Now we come to the case of SAUL OF TARSUS, who was later to be known as the apostle Paul. The initial account of his conversion is found in Acts 9:1-22. However, later on, Paul recounts his conversion at Jerusalem, which record is found in Acts 22:1-16. Please read BOTH accounts carefully before undertaking the following study:

I. SAUL GETS HIMSELF AUTHORISED TO GO TO THE SYNAGOGUES OF DAMASCUS TO BRING BACK TO JERUSALEM ANY CHRISTIANS HE MIGHT FIND THERE TO BE PUNISHED. (Acts 9:1-2; Acts 22:4-5)

- A. On his way to Damascus, as he came near, a light from heaven shined around him. (Acts 9:3; Acts 22:6)
- B. Saul fell to the earth. (Acts 9:4; 22:7)
- C. Saul heard a voice, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4; 22:7)
- D. Saul asked, "Who art thou Lord?" (Acts 9:5; 22:8)
- E. The Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." (Acts 9:5; 22:8)

NOTE: Bible students are often puzzled as to the meaning of this last clause. "IT IS HARD FOR THEE TO KICK AGAINST THE PRICKS." Those of us who are familiar with driving oxen possibly will find it easier to understand than others. Oxen, as we know, are driven with a goad or stick. The driver sits on the cart behind them, and they know by the prick of his stick what he wants them to do. Evidently Jesus was referring to Saul's conscience, as if it were an ox rebelling against its master. Just as an ox finds it hard to kick against the prick of a goad, even so Saul's CONSCIENCE was having difficulty resisting the EVIDENCES that Jesus was whom he CLAIMED to be - THE SON OF GOD. These evidences "pricked" his conscience. It was "hard" for him to "kick" against the "pricks".

- F. Saul, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to DO?" (Acts 9:6; 22:10)
- G. The Lord said, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou MUST do." (Acts 9:6; 22:10)
- H. Saul's companions stood speechless. (Acts 9:7)
- I. They were afraid. (Acts 22:9)
- J. Saul's companions heard a voice, but saw no one. (Acts 9:7)

NOTE: Acts 22:9 says they "saw indeed the light...but they heard not the voice." This seeming contradiction with Acts 9:7 may not be a contradiction after all. The word "hear" has many meanings. Sometimes it means for a SOUND TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION on the eardrums. Sometimes it means to OBEY. At other times it means to UNDERSTAND, etc. Thus it should be possible for Saul's companions to have "HEARD" (Acts 9:7) in ONE of these senses of the word, yet to have "HEARD NOT" (Acts 22:9) in an entirely different sense. For instance, they could have HEARD in the sense that the sound MADE AN IMPRESSION ON THEIR EARDRUMS yet NOT have heard in the sense of UNDERSTANDING what was said.

- K. Saul arose from the earth. (Acts 9:8)
- L. When Saul opened his eyes, he could not see. (Acts 9:8; Acts 22:11)
- M. His companions led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. (Acts 9:8; Acts 22:11)
- N. Saul was blind for three days. (Acts 9:9)
- O. During these three days, he neither ate nor drank. (Acts 9:9)

II. THE LORD SENDS ANANIAS TO TELL SAUL WHAT HE MUST DO.

- A. Ananias was a disciple of Jesus, who lived at Damascus, who was well-reported by the Jews. (Acts 9:10; Acts 22:12)
- B. The Lord appeared to Ananias in a vision. (Acts 9:10)
- C. The Lord said, "Ananias". (Acts 9:10)
- D. Ananias said, "Behold, I am here, Lord." (Acts 9:10)
- E. The Lord said, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for behold he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man

named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight." (Acts 9:11-12)

- F. Ananias seemed hesitant to go because of Saul's reputation as a persecutor of Christians. He said, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on the name. (Acts 9:13-14)
- G. But the Lord told Ananias to go ANYWAY, "for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:15-16)
- H. So Ananias obeyed the Lord, went as directed, and entered the house. (Acts 9:17)
- I. Ananias went to Saul, put his hands on him, and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, who 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." (Acts 9:17)
- J. Ananias said, "Brother Saul, receive thy sight." (Acts 22:13)
- K. Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales. (Acts 9:18)
- L. Saul received his sight forthwith. (Acts 9:18)
- M. Saul looked upon Ananias. (Acts 9:18)
- N. Ananias then PREACHED to Saul, "The God of our fathers hath CHOSEN thee, that thou shouldst KNOW HIS WILL, and see that Just One, and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? ARISE, and be BAPTIZED, and WASH AWAY THY SINS, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:14-16)
- O. Saul "AROSE, and was BAPTIZED." (Acts 9:18)

NOTE: It is admitted by all that Saul's conversion was a VERY SPECIAL case, in that Jesus Christ was choosing him not only to become his "DISCIPLE" but also an "APOSTLE." That his choosing to be an apostle was "special" is evident, when we remember that the OTHER apostles had to "have companied...all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up." (See Acts 1:21-22) This certainly could not be said of Saul of Tarsus, who later declared that Christ was "last of all...seen of me also, AS OF ONE BORN OUT OF DUE TIME. For I am the LEAST of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1 Corinthians 15:8-9)

The reason Saul was permitted to SEE Jesus as well as to HEAR the voice of his mouth, Ananias said, was so he could be HIS WITNESS unto all men of what he had SEEN and HEARD. (How utterly different from those who call themselves "Jehovah's Witnesses" today! Saul had both to SEE and HEAR Jesus to WITNESS what he had SEEN and HEARD. Those spurious "witnesses" today have NEITHER SEEN NOR HEARD Jesus – yet claimed to be his "witness." Some witnesses! They "testify" to what they have neither seen nor heard; they "witness" to what they have NOT witnessed!)

Some teach erroneously that Saul's sins were forgiven by him, when the light shined round about him from heaven and Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus. This sentimental doctrine sounds convincing to some; the trouble is IT IS JUST NOT SO.

Firstly, it is presumptive to teach such, since the word of God says nothing to that effect.

Secondly, instead of the Lord forgiving him then and there, he commanded him to "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be TOLD thee what thou MUST DO." (Acts 9:6) Jesus did not even PREACH THE GOSPEL to Saul directly; rather he had ANANIAS do it. This harmonizes with 2 Corinthians 4:7, where Paul declares, "...we have this treasure (the gospel) in EARTHEN vessels (i.e., human beings)."

Thirdly, when Ananias had finished preaching to Saul, he concluded by saying, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be BAPTIZED, and WASH AWAY THY SINS, calling on the name of the Lord.”

QUESTIONS: If Saul’s sins had already been forgiven by him on the road to Damascus, why did Ananias command him to “BE BAPTIZED, and WASH AWAY THY SINS” in the city of Damascus THREE DAYS LATER?

HOW deceived some people can get! In Saul’s conversion his being BAPTIZED is clearly connected with WASHING AWAY HIS SINS. Thus he “arose, and was BAPTIZED” (Acts 9:18) even before receiving meat. (v.19)

QUESTIONS ON LESSON SEVENTEEN

1. From our previous study of the conversions of the Samaritans, of Simon the Sorcerer, and the Ethiopian eunuch, what two things did all three cases have in common?

2. List five facts regarding the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch:

3. What was Saul's original purpose in going to Damascus, as described in Acts 9 and Acts 22?

4. What happened to Saul while on his way to Damascus?

5. How bright was the light that shined round about him on his way? (See Acts 26:13)

6. Explain Jesus' meaning wherein he told Saul, "... it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

7. Did the scriptures recounting Saul's conversion say anything about his sins being forgiven on the road to Damascus? If so, what?

8. If nothing was said about his sins being forgiven at that time, are we justified in presuming they were?

9. What did the Lord tell Saul would happen to him when he arose and went into the city?

10. Whatever was to be told Saul in the city of Damascus was it essential or unessential for him to do it?

11. In Acts 9:7, it says the men which journeyed with Saul stood speechless, "hearing a voice," but seeing no man. In Acts 22:9 it says they "saw indeed the light...but they heard not the voice."

Please explain this seeming contradiction:

12. How many days was Saul blind in the city of Damascus?

13. Describe Saul's attitude and actions during those days:

14. What special person was sent to Saul after he had been in Damascus for three days? Describe this person:

15. What did the Lord command Ananias to do?

16. Why did Ananias hesitate?

17. For what purpose did Jesus tell Ananias he had chosen Saul?

18. When did Saul receive his sight once more?

19. After Ananias preached to Saul, what he command him to do?

For what purpose was Saul baptized?
