

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Part Five in a Series of Ten



5. The Transformation Of Saul

SALVATION FOR THE WHOLE WORLD

'caring for **PEOPLE** for **PEOPLE** matter to God' Romans 5:8

HE SATURATED HIMSELF WITH THE LAW

PAUL: APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

1. It's hard to overestimate the importance of Paul to the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote at least thirteen books of the New Testament. He was God's instrument, above all others, to take the gospel to the Gentile world. Once converted, he careered off across the world spreading the news of what God had done and was doing in Jesus the Christ. His self-sacrifice and devotion, by God's grace, has inspired countless thousands down the years to heroic living. He wasn't Jesus the Lord, but he was a devoted servant and apostle of that blessed Lord. He wasn't always Christ's servant!

SAUL: PERSECUTOR OF JESUS CHRIST

2. When the kingdom divided back in the days of Rehoboam, only one tribe remained loyal to the royal tribe of Judah – Benjamin. Saul was a Benjamite. His religious upbringing was in the strict school of the Pharisees. He not only believed in all 39 Old Testament books, he felt strictly bound, as Pharisees did, to the oral traditions handed down from Moses and charismatic rabbis. He paid tithes (**taxes**) as all other Jews did, but where others stopped, he went on to pay taxes on even the herbs he used as flavouring for his food (**see Matthew 23:23**). He and his kind prayed more than others.

Did others fast? He fasted more! Did they study? He saturated himself with the Torah. Did they ceremoniously wash themselves? He washed more often! Did they feel passionately? He was **driven!** Were they consecrated people? He was **possessed!**

While others made progress, he was a rising star. While many had capable teachers, he was a student of the famous Gamaliel. **Were others talkers?** He was an activist! They would kill heretics in the heat of the moment. He would plan his campaign of death and imprisonment against them. They would deal with the local heretics; he would pursue them to distant cities.

All this and more we learn about Saul from the New Testament scriptures. In doing this to the followers of Christ, Saul was waging his personal war against the Lord of these people (**see Acts 26:9**).

DAMASCUS IS ABOUT 140 MILES NORTH AND EAST OF JERUSALEM

THE DAMASCUS ROAD EXPERIENCE

3. The story of what happened to Saul on the road to Damascus is told three times in the book of Acts! It is very important that you read all three recordings of that experience! **See Acts chapters 9,22 and 26.**

4. Damascus is about 140 miles north (**and east**) of Jerusalem. The walk would take about a week. Saul's companions were police from the authorities and since Saul was a strict Pharisee, he would have little to do with them. He would spend most of his time alone and do a lot of thinking.

The trip would almost certainly take him through Galilee, where this Jesus spent so much of his life. In the city there were disciples of this Jesus whom they claimed was the Christ. He would arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem to stand trial. That's what he intended. He would enter the city like an avenging angel, breathing out threats and slaughter. That's not what happened because something almost incredible occurred as he got near to the ancient city.

BUT HE NEEDED MORE AND MORE IS WHAT HE GOT

5. Around noon (Acts 22:6) light blazed on him and his companions and they all fell to the ground (26:13). It was then he heard a voice speaking to him in the language of the Hebrews (in Aramaic). 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goads.' (26:14) I get the impression from this last phrase that Saul was wrestling within himself about the truth of the Christian faith even though he persecuted them so fiercely. (Maybe part of the reason he was so fierce was because of the inner struggle!)

An ox, unused to the yoke, would kick back at the driver. The poorer farmers would have a sharp stick with which to jab the hind legs of the ox. The carts would be fitted with sharp points. The sooner the ox settled under the yoke, the sooner the pain of the goads would only be a memory. Stephen's arguments, the apostolic use of Scripture and the miracles wrought, the willingness to die rather than recant – all this and more may well have been gnawing at the mind of this 'defender of the faith'. But he needed more, and more is what he got. Now he is face to face with the very Lord himself!

6. Saul asks who this is that speaks to him (22:8). The answer comes with ruthless gentleness (22:15): 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting!' We can only imagine the turmoil within the heart of this Pharisee. Now he knows! What he might have been unsure of before, what he branded as untrue before, what he had sincerely opposed as heresy he now knew was true! He has now discovered the words of his famous teacher are true of him (Acts 5:39), he had been fighting against God! What can a man of integrity do when he discovers he has been wrong?

WHAT CAN A MAN OF INTEGRITY DO WHEN HE DISCOVERS HE WAS WRONG?

7. Humbly, Saul asks what Christ wants him to do (22:10). He is told to go into the city to a certain house where he would be told what he must do (9:6). His companions led him like a child, by the hand, blind and helpless to a house on Straight Street where he spent three days and nights wanting nothing to eat or drink. All he wanted to do was pray (9:9,11). What a different kind of entrance to the city than the one he had planned. What a different attitude he now has compared with days that were gone.

TAKING ON THE NAME OF JESUS

8. Then came a devout Jewish believer called Ananias to tell him what God had in mind for him in the future (22:14-15). He was to spread the word about Christ to the Gentile world, before kings and governors as well as to Fellow-Jews. He would suffer many things for the name of the Christ whom he had so persecuted (9:15-16). Now, with his sight restored, Ananias urges him: 'And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.' (22:16). He got up and he was baptised, taking on him the name of Jesus Christ (9:18 and see Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5 with Matthew 28:19). Then he broke his three day fast. (Isn't this a remarkable and wonderful story?!) Now Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the preacher (see Acts 13:9).

HE WAS BAPTISED, TAKING ON HIM THE NAME OF JESUS

THE MASTER'S MAN

9. Surely no one ever changed more radically than Saul. Once he understood what God was doing and had done in Christ Jesus, he was as valiant for God as he had been valiant against him. In Damascus he immediately begins to preach salvation in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (9:20-22).

Now he became the hunted as maddened unbelievers sought to silence him (9:23-25). Later he would preach in Jerusalem the very faith he once sought to destroy. There aren't many sights more inspiring than a man who has the heart, the courage, to embrace new truth, to confess he was wrong, to devote himself as unselfishly to a noble cause as he had devoted himself to some other.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:21-29 and get a brief picture of how this man spent the rest of his life. When friendly hands would try to slow him up, he would kindly but firmly shrug them off saying something like: 'I can't help living this way. The love of Christ drives me.' (See 2 Corinthians 5:14.) He now knows Christ gave himself for him (Galatians 1:3) and he cannot keep the loving gratitude from showing.

**IF SAUL CAN BE SAVED
ANYBODY CAN BE SAVED**

MESSAGES FROM PAUL'S CONVERSION

10. We learn many things from Paul's salvation. Let me mention only two things. The first is, If Saul can be saved, anyone can be saved! He makes this point himself in 1 Timothy 1:15-16 where he says: 'Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.' Paul, in essence, tells us: 'No one should think he is beyond salvation. Christ saved me to let everyone know that salvation is possible no matter how bad he is.'

11. The second message is this; Jesus must really be alive! How do you explain Saul's conversion? How do you explain his life after the Damascus road event? What enabled him to write so profoundly? His own explanation is that he met Jesus Christ one day on the road to that ancient city! People have tried to explain his transformed life by talking of epilepsy, guilt-complexes, hallucinations and the like. The nonsense of these guesses is plain to anyone with an open mind. His own witness of how and why his life changed is ignored by these people. Paul would tell you now: 'Jesus really lives. He really is God's Son and in him God really did come to rescue us all and to bring life into our **life** and hope into our hearts!'

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SAUL

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED IN PART FIVE

- The salvation and transformation of Saul is one of the strong proofs that Jesus rose from among the dead!
- Paul claims that his own salvation is, in part, a test case of the saving power of Christ. If Saul can be saved, then anyone can be saved! **1 Timothy 1:15-16.**
 - In trusting repentance Saul was baptised to have his sins washed away. **Acts 22:16.**
- Since Christ called a man, especially to go to the Gentiles with the gospel, we are assured that salvation is for the whole world! **Acts 26:17.**

EVALUATION SHEET

Please go ahead and fill in the evaluation sheet attached.

CONTACT DETAILS

Email: info@the-scriptures.co.uk

This study was written by © Jim McGuigan

EVALUATION SHEET

Acts LESSON 5

(Please type or write your answers within the lines provided)

Name:

Home Address or Email address:

TRUE OR FALSE? (If the statement is true write T, if false write F.)

1. Paul was lowered from a city wall in a basket! _____
2. Paul had an hallucination on the road to Damascus! _____
3. Paul said he was driven by his fear of Christ! _____
4. Ananias was never uneasy about going to Saul! _____
5. Epilepsy is a good explanation for Paul's conviction that he had seen the resurrected Lord! _____
6. Paul was told to be baptised to have his sins washed away! _____
7. Christ appeared to Paul around 6 p.m.! _____
8. Paul argued with Christ when he met him! _____
9. Paul's salvation was, in part, to give all men assurance that they aren't beyond saving! _____
10. Paul broke his three day fast and was then baptised! _____

WHO?

1. Was Paul's famous teacher? _____
2. Gave Paul letters authorising arrests? _____
3. Said: 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem'? _____
4. Said: 'Who are you, Lord'? _____
5. Owned the house Paul fasted and prayed in? _____
6. Said: 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do!'? _____

CIRCLE THE CORRECT SCRIPTURE:

1. Which teaches Paul had a pain-filled ministry for Christ:
1 Timothy 1:15-16 Matthew 28:19 2 Corinthians 11:21-29
2. Which says Pharisees paid tithe on tiny herbs:
Acts 22:3 Matthew 23:23 Acts 5:38-39
3. Where Saul was told to be baptised to have his sins washed away:
Acts 9:18 Acts 26:17 Acts 22:16

4. In which Christ identified himself with his persecuted people:
Acts 26:15 Acts 9:5 Acts 9:15-16

5. In which Paul says he is a test case for Christ's saving power:
Acts 22:14-15 1 Timothy 1:15-16 Acts 22:3

PUT A TICK NEXT TO THE SCRIPTURES WHEN YOU'VE READ THEM:

1. Acts 9:1-25 _____ 2. Acts 22:1-16 _____ 3. Acts 26:4-18 _____

4. 2 Corinthians 22:21-29 _____ 5. 1 Timothy 1:15-16 _____ 6. Matthew 28:19 _____

WHERE? (Consult the readings above)

- 1. Paul was born in what city? _____
- 2. Outside what city did Saul meet Christ? _____
- 3. Ananias was to go to what street to find Saul? _____

COMPLETE THIS STATEMENT: (As found in the booklet.)

- 1. Swift surgery at a crucial point _____

- 2. Where Peter was staying with a friend! _____

- 3. Philip was on a desert road that led to this place! _____

- 4. Where men criticised Peter over his dealings with Cornelius! _____

SENDING YOUR ANSWERS

Once we have received your evaluation sheet we will send you the next study in this series.

Please return your completed evaluation sheet as an email attachment to info@the-scriptures.co.uk