

Week 16

The Conversion of Saul – Key Person #3

Saul vs. Paul – Why the change?

As chapter nine opens, the infamous Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of Christians, is on campaign issuing murderous threats to followers of Jesus wherever he travels. After getting a letter to search synagogues (sort of like a warrant) in Damascus, Syria, Saul is on his way to stop this new movement from spreading any further, probably having heard that it was spreading throughout the region.

However, on his way, Saul has an encounter/vision of Jesus Christ. There is a famous painting that shows 'Paul' knocked off a white horse. However, scripture does not indicate that he was on a horse, although it is reasonable to think that he may have traveled that way. Verse four simply says he was knocked to the ground.

His traveling companions did not see Jesus but did hear a great sound. Apparently, the flash of light was accompanied by a great sound and the voice of Jesus. The scripture doesn't say that Saul saw Jesus, but he did see a great light. This is consistent with what we know of Jesus from John's gospel; He is the uncreated light and the source of all light; thus, He is the light of the world.

Saul is blinded after the encounter and is told to go on into the city to a man named Ananias. Saul's reputation as a dangerous and violent man of persecution preceded him as Ananias was hesitant to follow through with receiving Saul.

We should also note that Ananias had a 'vision' of Jesus, through which he heard his command to go to Saul and minister to him. The question is worthy of asking, "Why did the church leaders so readily receive visions from Jesus, which today seem rare and even strange?" In scripture, both Old and New Testament, God usually communicated through visions.

There has been much speculation through the ages, about Saul and his name change to Paul. After all, Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter. It is interesting to note that nowhere in Acts does Jesus change Saul's name. In fact, he is referred to as Saul throughout the book until chapter 13 verse 9, where we read, "... he was also called Paul".

"Paulus" was most likely Saul's given Roman name, as scripture points out that he held Roman citizenship. Saul likely used his Jewish name, which was quite appropriate being from the tribe of Benjamin, where King Saul was its best known member, until he began ministering intentionally to the Gentile world. The name "Paul" was much more acceptable in the Gentile world. If we follow the chronology of Paul's life from conversion, he used his Jewish name 'Saul' for

approximately 14 years, having been converted somewhere between 34-37 AD and set out for Cypress (Gentile missionary journey) around 48 AD.

One more very important thing to note about Paul's conversion story in Chapter 9, is the ministry of Ananias to him. Paul already believed in Jesus through his vision. Ananias addresses him as "Brother Saul", one of the believers. Notice that Paul receives the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by Ananias, the sacramental act which we previously saw Peter and John doing so that believers would be filled with the Spirit. However, while we know from his later writings that Paul does have the gift of Tongues, there is no mention of it as a part of his Conversion and Sanctification experience; this would have been a significant detail for Luke to include if it was meant to be taught as a necessary sign of believers being filled with the Spirit, for all generations to come.

B. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL (9:1-30). KEY PERSON # 3

1. Saul's Vision of Jesus (9:1-9)
2. Ananias Ministers to Saul (9:10-19a)
3. Paul Proclaims Jesus as the Christ (9:19b-30)

