

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**ACTS CHAPTER 9 – Part 2****TURNAROUND****Acts 9:8-19**

The showdown at high noon on the Damascus road resulted in a total turnaround for Saul of Tarsus. There is no question about whether or not Saul of Tarsus was truly converted on the Damascus road. There is irrefutable evidence that here was a man who met the Master and was ever after mastered by that Master. He did not meet his match, but met The Master!

The immediate and lasting change that took place in his life is nothing short of amazing -- that is the nature of true conversion. The change in the life of one who has met Jesus Christ in a salvation experience is so dramatic and drastic that the experience is called being "born again" -- it is a new birth, a rebirth! Paul later put it like this, *"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away, and behold, all things are become new."* (II Cor.5:17)

Another word to describe this life-changing experience is, "conversion." The word "convert" or "converted" comes from the Latin word "convertere" meaning to "turn around." It means to change one's mind resulting in a change of one's direction. Jesus said in Matthew "Except you be converted [turn around] and become as little children, you shall all likewise perish." [Matthew 18:3]

Saul was born again - he was converted - there was a drastic turn around in his life. Notice the change that is reflected in the following verses:

Acts 8:1 – *"Now Saul was consenting to his death."* (Stephen)

Acts 9:1 - *"Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."*

Acts 20:1 – *"Paul called the disciples to himself and embraced them."*

Every genuine child of God can say, in the words of a familiar gospel song: "What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought, since Jesus came into my heart."

THREE CLASSIC CONVERSIONS

There are three classic conversions recorded here in the Book of Acts. One is in chapter 8, one in chapter 9, and one in chapter 16. In chapter 8 there is recorded the conversion of the Ethiopian; in chapter 9 there is the record of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus; in chapter 16

we have the account of the conversion of the Jailer of Philippi.

All three men had a special messenger sent to them. In the case of the Ethiopian, Philip; in the case of Saul, the Lord Jesus Christ himself; in the case the Philippian Jailer, it was the converted Paul.

One man was a politician, the Ethiopian; one was a religious zealot, Saul; one was a Civil Servant, the Jailer. (God can save anyone!)

One man was on his way home - the Ethiopian; one man was going away from home - Saul; one man was at home – the Jailer. (God can save persons anywhere!)

Saul was saved at midday; the Jailer at midnight. (God saves persons at any time!)

All three persons were immediately baptized after their conversion. But the most obvious thing about these three men's experiences is this: there was a drastic change in each of the three persons thereafter.

Let us give particular attention to the complete turnaround in the life of Saul of Tarsus after his conversion experience. To say that a drastic change took place in his life is somewhat of an understatement. Once he persecuted, now he preached; once he fought the cause of Christ, now he followed the Christ. But let us be more specific:

I. HIS CONDUCT WAS CHANGED.

“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.” (Acts 9:10-12)

Can you imagine how Ananias must have felt? The only thing that came near matching the panic Saul felt on the road to Damascus was the fear that Ananias felt when the Lord appeared to him and told him to go to meet the dreaded Saul of Tarsus. Ananias probably knew that he was on Saul's list to be arrested for being a Christian, and he probably knew the reason Saul had been on his way to Damascus, for news like that travels ahead of the arresting officer.

Ananias reminded the Lord about this as follows: *“Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” (Acts 9:13-14)*

Try putting yourself inside the skin of Ananias and you can imagine the fear that surged through him. Surely he feared that this was a trick of Saul. But Saul was a changed man at this point. Notice what God said to Ananias in Acts 9:11 - *“he is praying.”* Now that must have been somewhat settling to Ananias' ragged nerves. When people begin to pray it is a sure sign that something has changed or is changing and their lives.

The fact that Saul was praying is God's proof to Ananias that Saul was a changed man and he need no longer be afraid of him. One of the best indications that you have truly been saved, that there has been a genuine change in your life, is that you will begin to pray. This was an indication that there had been a change in Saul's conduct.

II. HIS COMMISSION WAS CHANGED.

"But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:15-16)

Before Saul's conversion, his mission was to persecute those who name the name of Jesus Christ. Now his commission was to preach the name of Jesus Christ. The Lord did not tell Ananias all that he had planned for Saul. That would have been too much too soon for this new babe in Christ. The Lord seldom gives us our whole life's plan all at once. He gives us just enough to help us set our long-range goals and then walk in obedience to Him each day.

One of the most moving scenes in all of Scripture is what happened when Ananias and went to Saul. He found the feared persecutor all alone, blind, and helpless. All of the hurt and fear that Ananias had felt for what this man had done to his brothers and sisters in Christ drained away. The same Lord who told him to go to Saul, lived in him and was giving him grace to obey and faith to act. It was with the Lord's deep compassion and acceptance that Ananias went to Saul and said, *"Brother Saul."* "Brother?" Yes! Ananias had taken the Lord's command seriously.

Don't you know that it took courage, faith and love for Ananias to get the word out of his mouth and say, "Brother Saul"? Saul needed that confirmation. He had sat for three days in the dark, blinded by the brilliance surrounding the person of Jesus Christ. Ananias not only affirmed Saul by accepting him as a "brother" but Ananias' words were coupled with physical warmth -- he laid his hands upon Saul. This man Saul, who had laid his hands on many to harm them, now experienced the touch of love for healing and his sight was restored.

I wish I could have been in a corner in that room that day when Ananias met Saul, called him "brother" and placed his hands upon Saul, restoring his sight. What do you think followed that meeting between these two men? I imagine a scene like this: Saul stood, looked at Ananias and said, "Brother!" And they embraced. I cannot help but believe that ever after, Ananias held a special place in the heart of Saul.

The turnaround that Saul experienced not only resulted in change of conduct and a changed commission but it resulted in a changed confession.

III. HIS CONFESSION WAS CHANGED.

"Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased

all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.” (Acts 9:18-22)

Notice the words *“and was baptized”* in verse 18. In the early church, baptism was the public confession of faith in Jesus Christ as one's Savior. It indicated severance from the past life and the beginning of a new life. I have been on many missions fields and have seen entire villages turn out for baptismal services. When a person is baptized upon a valid confession of faith, it identifies that individual with the Church of Jesus Christ.

By being baptized Saul was in essence saying, "I believe Jesus Christ is the son of God; that he died for my sins; that he was buried and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures." This was Saul's new confession.

Listen to Saul's old confession: *“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” (Phil. 3:5-6)*

Saul's confession was changed which indicated that his commission had changed. According to verse 14 he had come to Damascus to *“bind all that called upon the name of the Lord”* but now he had joined with Christians, had changed his confession and publicly took his stand with Jesus Christ in baptism. What a change! What a turnaround!

IV. HIS COMPANY HAD CHANGED.

“So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.” (Acts 9:19)

At first, he was a menace to the disciples and now he had joined the disciples. And later on he would be ahead of the disciples leading them! Show me someone who professes to be a Christian but who does not prefer to be in the company of other Christians, and I will show you someone who has never been genuinely turned around. Saul experienced a complete turnaround in his life -- you might call it a total makeover:

- His conduct was changed;
- His commission was changed;
- His confession was changed;
- His company was changed.

A true conversion, a total turnaround, produces genuine and evident change. There is no record in the entire Bible of a greater life-change than we see in Saul, the man who met his Master on the Damascus road.

Illustration: There was a man who sold the firewood in his town and he always took advantage by cutting his logs a few inches shorter than the required length and when you ordered a cord of wood (A cord of wood is 4 feet high, 4 feet wide, and 8 feet long.) you were really getting less than you were paying for. One day the report was circulated throughout the town that the man had been converted. No one believed the report because they all agreed that this man was beyond hope.

One man, however, slipped quietly out of the grocery store where the conversation about the woodcutter's conversion was being discussed. In a short time, he came running back into the store and excitedly exclaimed, "It's so! He really has been converted!" They all asked, "How do you know?" And the man replied, "I have been over to his wood yard and measured the wood that he cut this morning and he has stopped cutting the logs short!" The testimony convinced that crowd gathered in the country store that this man had been converted because he had changed his ways.

Saul was a changed man and Ananias and the Christians in Damascus soon found that out. There is no heart so tightly closed that God cannot enter it; there is no rock so hard that God cannot break it! Saul was certainly a hard case, but God melted his heart and he has done the same with thousands ever since.

Illustration: One of the most notoriously bad characters that ever lived in New York City was Orville Gardner. He was the trainer of prizefighters, and all of his companions were hard characters. His reputation was so bad that his nickname was "Awful" Gardner.

"Awful" Gardner had a little boy whom he dearly loved, but this boy died. A short time after his boy's death, "Awful" was standing in a New York saloon surrounded by a number of his cronies. The night was sweltering and he stepped outside the saloon to get some fresh air. As he stood there he looked up between the tall buildings and saw a star shining.

He said to himself, "I wonder where my little boy is tonight?" And then the thought came to him like a flash, "If there is a heaven, that's where he is and if he is there, I will never be there unless my life is changed." At that moment he made a decision to seek help. He hurried from the saloon to the room where his godly mother was. He asked his mother to pray for him, and he and his mother spent the remainder of the night in conversation and prayer. Toward morning, "Awful" Gardner trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior and was changed from the inside out.

He had an insatiable appetite for alcohol and had at that time a gallon of whiskey in his possession. He knew that he dare not keep it and finally he took it down to the river and got in a boat, rowed over to an island, set the liquor on a rock, knelt down and prayed, and God gave him deliverance from alcohol.

He left the island a free man and became a mighty preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He visited Sing Sing prison and it was through his preaching that a young Irish convict named Jerry McAuley trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior. McAuley founded the McAuley Water Street Mission in New York City. A self-described "rogue and street thief" who spent seven years in Sing Sing prison during the 1860's, McAuley's mission became America's first Rescue Mission and is now known as the New York City Rescue Mission.

It is well to remember that few Christians have a conversion experience as spectacular as was Saul's or "Awful" Gardner's. However a person need not question their salvation simply because their salvation experience was less dramatic than these two. Most changed persons do not experience a flash of light or a voice from heaven. However, the evidences in their

lives that they have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, are just as real as they were in the life of Saul. Has there ever been a turnaround in your life?

Illustration: I read recently in our local newspaper about a man who got into some minor trouble with the police. He was quoted in the newspaper as saying, "I got into some trouble and I'm not satisfied with myself. I guess I'll have to let God change me a little bit." I've got news for him – God does not change anyone "a little bit!" When God gets involved in a life it is a total makeover, a complete turnaround! He is not interested in just washing our faces, He gives us a complete bath! If you are not a genuine, full-fledged disciple of Jesus Christ, the Savior Who saved a Saul on the road to Damascus can save you today if you will put your faith in Him as your Savior from sin. God specializes in making saints out of sinners!

JdonJ