

Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

FOURTH QUARTER.

STUDIES IN ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

(Condensed from *Expository Bible Notes*.)

LESSON I. October 2. Acts 9: 1-20.

SAUL OF TARSUS CONVERTED.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."—John 3:3.

EXPLANATORY.

I. SAUL, WHO IS CALLED PAUL.—His parents were Jews of the tribe of Benjamin. They were Pharisees and "Hebrews of the Hebrews," i. e., they could trace their descent in the direct line from Abraham, and were strict in their adherence to the Jewish laws and traditions (Phil. 3: 5). His father was a Roman citizen (Acts 22: 28), possessing the peculiar rights of citizenship, probably as a reward for distinguished services to the Roman state. Paul was born at Tarsus, the chief city of Cilicia, in Asia Minor, probably about the year A. D. 2. Here could be obtained the best secular learning of the age. He was educated in piety at home, and in the law and traditions under Jewish rabbis. He was taught the trade of tent-making, the material being either cilicium, a cloth made of the long and beautiful goat's hair, for which Cilicia was noted, or skins of animals, so that "Chrysostom calls Paul at one time a *tent-stitcher*, and at another a *leather-cutter*." At about 10 years of age he was sent to Jerusalem, where he studied the Bible, Roman law, and the Greek literature.

II. OPPOSING THE TRUTH WITH ALL HIS MIGHT.—1. And, *Saul*, as in Rev. Ver., in contrast with the missionary zeal of Philip, who was preaching the gospel of love, while Saul was yet breathing out threatenings, etc.

2. And desired of him letters, constituting his transport and his authority and commission (28: 19). The high priest issued them with the authority of the Sanhedrin (26: 82). To Damascus. The oldest city in the world. Situated about 140 miles north-east of Jerusalem. According to Jewish tradition, it was built by Uz, the great-grandson of Noah. In St. Paul's time it must have had a large population.

WHAT AUTHORITY HAD THE HIGH PRIESTS OVER THE PEOPLE IN DAMASCUS? (1) All Jews, however, remote their dwelling, acknowledge Jerusalem as the capital of their nation. (2) The Romans, at least up to this period, never disturbed the Jews in the exercise of their religion, but often protected them from the interference of other than the high priest and elders of the Holy City exercised the same sort of spiritual supremacy over the synagogues of the adjacent countries, as the pope and cardinals have since assumed over the churches in connection with Rome. To the synagogues, as holding the local authority. There were a number of them in Damascus. *Rev. Ver.* The way. The name "the way" soon became a distinctive appellation of the Christian religion. *Whether they were men or women.* The Acts of the Apostles continually makes prominent the faith, ministry, and witness-bearing of Christian women; and we know from heathen as well as from early Christian writers, that the lives of Christian women bore noble testimony to the faith of Jesus.

III. HIS CONVERSION.—3. As he journeyed. The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus is 140 miles, and would occupy Saul five or six days. There is little doubt that he rode on horseback, as usually represented, and his "followers" were some mounted, some on foot, like a caravan of the present day. Suddenly (about noon, 22: 6) there shined round about him light from heaven. The light was "above the brightness of the sun" (20: 13). The midday glare of an eastern sun is of itself exceedingly bright, and the hour was chosen, we cannot doubt, in order that "the glory" of the heavenly light should not be confounded with any natural phenomena.

4. And heard a voice saying, in the Hebrew tongue (26: 14). In all three accounts the name Saul here is a translation of the Hebrew name of Saul, *Saul*, while in every other case the Greek from *Saulos* is used. *Saul*, repeated for emphasis. *Why persecuted thou Me?* Christ speaks of Himself as persecuted by Saul, because "in all the affliction of His people He is afflicted" (Isa. 63: 9), and "who touches them, touches the apple of His eye" (Zech. 2: 8).

5. And the Lord said, I am Jesus. Note that Jesus presents Himself to Saul in His loving name as Saviour and helper, even though Saul was persecuting Him. It is hard, etc. These words (and the first clause of ver. 6) are rightly omitted from the Revised Version. But they belong to the story, for Paul himself utters them in 26: 14. *To kick against the pricks, i. e., goods.* The ox, being driven from behind, not, as with us, from the side, would strike against the goad, if it resisted by kicking. This was common Greek proverb, expressive of the impotent rage which bursts itself instead of its object, and is found in *Aeschylus*, *Euripides*, and *Pindar*.

6. Trembling and astonished. These words should be wholly omitted. *Lord*. He now sees in the despoiled Nazarene his Lord and Master. *What wilt Thou have me to do?* The question implies that he is ready to obey, but does not know what is required of him. He is waiting for guidance. *Arise and go into the city (Damascus), and it shall be told thee, etc.* He was not yet prepared for the full revelation of his duty. It takes time for the new thoughts and purposes to become calm and clear, for his decisions to mature. God leads us step by step.

7. The men with him, *i. e., stood speechless.* This at first seems at variance with Paul's statement in 26: 14, that all fell to the earth. But stood here is not spoken in opposition to falling, but to moving on. They came to a full stop. They did not move. Or Lewis's view may be correct, that all were first struck down by the light; but though Paul lay blind still commanded to rise, the rest would at once start to their feet, and would stand in amazement. *Hearing voices (the sound), but seeing no man.* We are told by St. Paul himself (chap. 22: 9)

that they "did not hear the voice." What is meant is clearly that they did not hear the words—could attach no meaning to the sounds which for Saul himself had so profound a significance. 8. And when his eyes were opened. Probably after some interval. *Saw no man.* *Saw nothing.* He was totally blind. Saul does not appear to have ever recovered his sight as before, if, as many think, his "thorn in the flesh" was a trouble with his eyes.

IV. THREE DAYS OF DARKNESS AND CONFLICT. 9. He was three days without sight. The blindness of Saul was no doubt mercifully intended by Providence to compel him to attend without distraction to the great matters which had been placed before him. The state of his mind may be gathered from the fact that he took no food or drink during that interval. And versed as he was in the Bible, he could, even in his blindness, search the Scriptures, and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was enabled clearly to discern the whole scheme of Christian doctrine in its fullness and truth.

WHAT WAS THE CHANGE BROUGHT IN PAUL BY HIS CONVERSION? Before conversion he was sincere, moral, religious. Were not these enough? The change was: (1) Before conversion he was sincerely wrong; now he is sincerely right; before he was only partially sincere, not seeking the whole truth before all things; now his sincerity was complete. Much the same is true of his religion. (2) Before conversion he was moral, but it was self-righteousness, proud and formal. Now he had morality transformed by love to God and man, which is the only true morality. (3) By conversion he became humble, trustful, repentant, and his sins were forgiven. (4) By conversion the whole purpose and aim of his life was changed.

V. THE WAY INTO THE LIGHT. 10. And (Now) there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias. Of this disciple we have no further mention in Holy Writ except in chap. 22: 12, where St. Paul describes him as a "devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwell" at Damascus.

11. The street which is called Straight. In the time when the events related in the Acts took place, the main thoroughfare of Damascus was the street called "Straight," so called from its running in a direct line from the eastern to the western gate. It was a mile long, it was a hundred feet wide, and divided by Corinthian columns into three avenues. At present it is "a narrow thoroughfare, inclosed on either side by bare unsightly walls." It is remarkably straight in some parts well as narrow. *Turned.* The capital of Cilicia, on the river Cydnus, described by Xenophon as great and flourishing. *For, behold, he prayeth.* This fact of Saul's praying seems mentioned by the Lord to reassure Ananias. As a strict Pharisee (Phil. 3: 6), Saul had doubtless often prayed, or said his prayers. But now he really prays.

15. A chosen vessel. A selected instrument, i. e., selected by God, and for the purpose indicated in the remainder of the sentence. One of the rarest intellects that ever glowed in a human frame changed hands that day. It was this experience that led Paul to feel so deeply the divine side of conversion. God chose him before he chose God. *Unto Me.* Not only chosen by Me, but prepared for Me and devoted to Me. *To bear My name; i. e., make known His nature, character and work.* Before the Gentiles. He became the great apostle to the Gentiles. And kings. King Agrippa II. and Queen Bernice, at Caesarea, as the Emperor Nero at Rome, the Roman governors Sergius Paulus, Gallio, Felix, and Festus. And the children of Israel. It was Paul's custom first, we know, ever to tell the story of the redemption of the children of Israel in every city where there was a synagogue or congregation of the chosen people.

17. And Ananias went his way, from his house to the house of Judas, where Saul was. Brother Saul. Showing that he believed in the revelation made to him, and accepted Saul as a fellow-disciple. That appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest. Showing that Saul actually saw Jesus. "Sight... Holy Ghost." He brought two great gifts, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The receiving of sight was to him a proof that he had received the power of the Spirit, the extraordinary gifts and qualifications needful for his work.

18. There fell from his eyes as it had been scales. "He experienced the sensation as if there had fallen something like scales from his eyes. . . . The blindness was an emblem of the darkness and prejudice which before veiled his eyes; and the falling off of the scales represented the clearer views of divine truths which he should afterwards receive." *He was baptized.* Great honor was here placed upon the sacrament of baptism, inasmuch as not even Saul, who had seen the Lord in special revelation, and was an elect vessel, was permitted to dispense with this, the Lord's appointed way of admission into His church.

VI. THE YOUNG CONVERT AT WORK. Vers. 19, 20. Note the suggestive stages in Paul's conversion: (1) a sudden providence; (2) producing conviction of sin; (3) a desire to know duty; (4) help from Christian friends; (5) filled with the Holy Ghost; (6) confessing Christ in baptism; (7) testifying from his experience; (8) increasing in strength.

19. When he had received meat, i. e., food. The three days' fast (ver. 9), and the intense inward conflict had obviously brought about a state of extreme prostration. *He was strengthened.* His physical condition was attended to. So God fed Elijah when he was desponding. 20. Straightway, immediately. Preached (proclaimed) Christ (Rev. Ver. Jesus), in the synagogues. He gave his religious experience, testifying to what Jesus had done for him. The change in such a man must have had marvellous power in leading others to Christ, and his prominence as a Jew must have led many to hear him. As a Jewish rabbi he would have easy access to the synagogues. Preached Christ. That Jesus is the Son of God. The best manumissions have here Jesus instead of Christ. And the difference is not merely verbal. What Paul preached was, not the doctrine that the Jewish Messiah was the Son of God, but the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and the long-promised Messiah, "the very Christ" (ver. 22).

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I HEREBY GIVE YOU NOTICE that in default of payment of certain mortgage money owing to me by virtue of the Indenture of Mortgage executed by Richard P. Knox and his wife and John Knox and Mary A. Knox, and all others whom it may concern, bearing date the twenty-eighth day of November, A. D. 1887, and the other Indentures of Mortgage executed by said Richard P. Knox and Mary A. Knox, bearing date the fourth day of June, A. D. 1890, I shall, on Saturday, the twenty-ninth day of October next, at twelve o'clock noon, at Chas. H. Gabriel's, in Prince William Street, in the City of Saint John, in the County of Kings, and in the Province of New Brunswick, proceed to a sale of the lands and premises mentioned and described in said Indentures of Mortgage, in and to the City and County of Saint John, in the County of Kings, and in the Province of New Brunswick, and in execution of the powers thereby vested in me. Dated the twenty-first day of August, A. D. 1892.

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I HEREBY GIVE YOU NOTICE that in default of payment of certain mortgage money owing to me, by virtue of the Indenture of Mortgage executed by Alexander Russell, Henry Russell and James Russell, bearing date the fourth day of June, A. D. 1890, I shall, on Saturday, the fifth day of October next, at twelve o'clock noon, at Chas. H. Gabriel's, in Prince William Street, in the City of Saint John, in the County of Kings, and in the Province of New Brunswick, proceed to a sale of the lands and premises mentioned and described in said Indenture of Mortgage, in and to the City and County of Saint John, in the County of Kings, and in the Province of New Brunswick, and in execution of the powers thereby vested in me. Dated the twenty-third day of May, A. D. 1892.

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Resolutions passed at the recent Convention, Bridgetown, N. S.:

1. That we express our thanks to the advisory committee for the well-developed plans leading to the organization of a Maritime B. Y. P. U.

2. That we express our heartfelt thanks to Rev. Dr. Wilkins, the representative of the International Society, for his mature advice and indefatigable labors, as also for the inspiration lent us.

3. That we express our gratitude for the harmonious sentiment which prevailed in organization.

4. That we recommend all pastors and local workers to earnestly study the methods and advantages of this onward movement among the young people of our churches.

5. That we express our gratitude to God for so richly blessing our young people on this continent, reaching to so many organizations similar to our own.

6. That we heartily approve of the B. Y. P. U. of America as a necessary center for co-ordinating a movement so extensive as the Baptist young people are entering upon.

7. That we are glad to establish fraternal relations with the General International Union.

8. That we approve of the educational methods outlined by the general secretary, and recommend to all Young People's Societies of whatever name, especially the daily devotional Bible reading and the course of studies on the life of Christ.

9. That, as far as possible, we would recommend local societies to carry out the suggestion of the International Union as to optional educational work, the leisure reading course on the life of Christ, and the weekly synopsis, giving prominence to the missionary work, our distinctive Baptist principles and history, and also the popular lecture course by pastors on the life of Christ.

10. That we appreciate the great importance of education for our Baptist young people in the schools under the special supervision of our denomination in these provinces, and would urge the attention of our young people to the merits of our institutions at Wolfville and St. Martins, and also commend these schools to their support.

11. That we appreciate the courtesy of the MARITIME AND VISITOR in giving our Union space for a special department in the interests of our work, and that we make the MARITIME AND VISITOR our local organ, and the Young People's Union our general organ for the publication of official reports.

12. That we hear with pleasure that the World's Fair is to be closed on Sunday, but regret that up to this time equal success has not favored the movement to suppress the sale of intoxicants; and we would reaffirm our conviction that this failure is to be deplored, and express the earnest hope that measures may still be found to make the Exposition, by the rebuke of this loss of society, worthy of the great age in which we live.

We would also call attention to the resolution unanimously adopted by the late Baptist Convention held at Bridgetown. "Your committee appointed to consider what recognition shall be given by the Convention to the Baptist Young People's Union of the Maritime Provinces beg to report as follows: That the Convention approves of the organization and heartily commends it to the consideration and fostering care of the churches; and would urge that all young people, whether formed into societies or not, to pursue the daily devotional reading and the studies in the life of Christ as outlined by the International Union."

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