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The Sabbath School

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Second Quarter Lesson I April 6 1902

SAUL OF TARSUS CONVERTED.—Acts 9 : 1-12.

Study Verses 1-20.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.*—Acts 3 : 19.

LEARN BY HEART.

Vs. 5, 6; John 3 : 16; Isa. 55 : 7; 2 Cor. 5 : 17.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—Probably in A. D. 35 to 37. The common date has been A. D. 37. Lewin places it at midsummer.

The later authorities are inclined to an earlier date: McGiffert to 31; Ramsay, 33; Thatcher, 34 or 35.

Place.—Near Damascus, the capital of Syria, one hundred and forty miles north of Jerusalem. Damascus was called "the paradise of God"; the Abana and Pharpar, to which Naaman referred as "better than all the waters of Israel," made the region "blossom as the rose."

It is probably the oldest city in the world. In Paul's time there were many Jews and several synagogues. At the present time there are "not less than one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants." A railroad runs or will when completely finished, from Damascus to Acre on the Mediterranean.

THE MAN PAUL.—1. His Names. It was common among the Jews in foreign lands to have two names. Saul was Paul's Hebrew name. Paul, meaning little, was his Roman name, inherited with his Roman citizenship. His family name is nowhere given.

2. He was born in Tarsus, probably about A. D. 2.

3. Family and Social position. His parents were Jews of pure descent, strict Pharisees in belief and life, possessed of Roman citizenship. His manners were those of a citizen of the world familiar with the habits of good society.

It is apparent that Paul was poor during his early missionary career, while later, in Cesarea and Rome, he appears as a man of distinction and means. Professor Ramsay interprets this as meaning that Paul was cast off by his family as an apostate and foe to his race and his religion, on account of his becoming a Christian.

His Education. Till he was about twelve years old Paul lived in the atmosphere of a cultured, scholarly university town. It is impossible not to see a great difference between him and the twelve in this respect. At an early age he was sent to Jerusalem, where he studied the law under Gamaliel. The whole atmosphere of Jerusalem must have greatly influenced him for he was of a deeply religious nature.

His Personal Traits. As to his personal appearance, from all we can gather he was a man of not more than medium stature, and with possibly some personal defect, but a man of physical strength and gracious attractiveness.

His Character. Paul must have had a winsome character, greatly increased after his conversion. He had a strong will, an intense nature that conquered obstacles a deep, religious nature, desiring to do right, and to serve God. He was a seer and prophet, a great orator, a poet.

PAUL THE PERSECUTOR.—Vs. 1, 2. Although some time had elapsed Saul's burning zeal had not declined. *Breathing out threatenings and slaughter.* It must have greatly intensified his rage to see that the more he persecuted the church, the faster it grew. *Went*, of his own accord. *High priest*, who as chief of the Jews exercised authority in such matters. *Letters to Damascus.* Whither probably not a few of those persecuted in Jerusalem had gone in order to be safe. *To the synagogue.* The seat of Jewish authority there. *Any of this way*, disciples of Christ. *Bring them bound into Jerusalem*, where was the highest authority to inflict the severest penalties..

JESUS ARRESTS HIS CAREER.—Vs. 3-7. *As he journeyed.* Perhaps on horseback or on camel. His followers were some mounted, some on foot, like a caravan. *Near Damascus.* Probably within sight of the city. *Suddenly* (about noon) *there shined round him a bright light from heaven.* The light was above the brightness of the sun. *Fell on the earth.* Blinded and amazed. The whole company fell with him. *Heard a voice.* Clear and distinct to him, but a mysterious sound to others. *Saul Saul*, In the Hebrew tongue. *Why persecutest thou me?* He thought he was persecuting the disciples of a poor rabbi, an imposter; and instead, he now saw that he was persecuting this living and glorified Jesus. *Who art thou Lord?* Sir, a title of respect. *Whom thou persecutest*, in the person of his disciples. *To kick against the pricks, i. e.*, goads, as unruly oxen sometimes did. This was a common Greek proverb, expressive of the rage which hurts itself instead of its object. *Trembling and astonished* Many a sinner feels in the same way when he first sees himself as he is. *What wilt thou have me to do?* He would see clearly what is required of him. *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. The experience of mature Christians can be a great help to one inquiring the way.

Note the three steps of Paul's progress toward the light: (1) conviction; (2) desire to learn the way; (3) help from Christian experience. *Stood speechless, hearing a voice.* The sound of the voice, without understanding it. *But seeing no man* The bystanders saw the light but no person, implying that Paul did see Jesus as he states in 1 Cor. 15 : 8.

THE GREAT CONFLICT.—Vs. 8, 9 *When his eyes were opened he saw no man.* The blindness was the clearest proof that the appearance vouchsafed had been a reality. *And 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.

COMING INTO THE LIGHT.—Vs. 10-18. *A certain disciple..... named Ananias.* We know nothing further about him except that "he was a good man, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt at Damascus. *Street....called Straight.* A main thoroughfare of the city going straight 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. *In the house of Judas.* He was probably not then a Christian, but one of whom Paul had letters. *Behold, he prayeth.* He is asking God for light and help. *Then Ananias answered.* Ananias naturally hesitated to go to the house of the well-known opponent of the gospel. This hesitation does not prove Ananias to be either disobedient or faithless. He only wanted to be sure that he understood, for the command was so strange. *Thy saints.* Consecrated to the service of God. *A chosen vessel*, selected by God, and for the purpose indicated in the remainder of the sentence. God chose him before he chose God. *Unto me*, prepared for me and devoted to me. *Gentiles.* Paul was especially the apostle to the Gentiles. *And kings.* Paul fulfilled this when he appeared before Agrippa at Cesarea perhaps the Emperor Nero at Rome, and when he pleaded before the tribunals of the Roman governors Sergius Paulus, Gallio, Felix and Festus. *Brother Saul.* A Christian brother. *Sight....Holy Ghost* He brought two great gifts,—sight, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. *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. *Was baptized.* As a confession of Christ, and the divine method of admission to the membership of the disciples.

PAUL THE DISCIPLE.—Vs. 19 22. *When he had received meat, i. e.*, The three days' feast and the inward conflict had brought extreme prostration. *He was strengthened* both spiritually and bodily. *Certain days.* A few days.

Paul went to work for his Master. *Straightway.* Immediately *Preached* (proclaimed) *Christ*(Jesus) *in the synagogues.* He gave his religious experience, testifying to what Jesus had done for him, and that Jesus was the Messiah.

Second: Paul went into retirement. From a comparison of the following verses with Gal. 1 : 15-18, we learn, that after preaching awhile he went into Arabia, either in the desert regions near Damascus, or in the region of Sinai. Here he remained three years. There was need of no little meditation and study before Paul could understand the Scriptures sufficiently to preach them aright. So Christ waited till he was 30 years old before he began his mission.

Third: The Longer Preparation. From Arabia Paul returned to Damascus, where he was persecuted, and escaped in a basket let down through a window over the walls of the city. He then went to Jerusalem for the first time since his conversion. Here, too, he was persecuted, and retired to his native region, of which Tarsus was the capital. It was some years before he fully entered upon his great work.

The Change Wrought in Paul by his Conversion.—The purpose and trend of his life was changed. Henceforth he lived wholly for Jesus and for the salvation of men.

2. He now accepted Jesus as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

3. He was changed in his life-work. He was indeed a new creation, with new life, new character, new motives, new hopes, new love, new purpose, new work.

Sudden Conversions Versus Gradual Changes. 1. There are many ways in which persons become Christians; compare Paul with John; Matthew with most of the other apostles; Luther and his long struggle, with John Bunvan who could not tell the day of his conversion. There is no model or form to which all must conform.

2. The one essential question is not how one becomes a Christian, but the fact of being one.

3 In one sense there are seldom, if ever, absolutely instantaneous conversions, for there are always circumstances and influences preparing the way. On the other hand, there is, probably, a definite time when one has actually changed his course of life, whether he is conscious of it or not.

4. Changes in men, like this in Saul, are the greatest proofs of Christianity. They are the miracles through its whole course of almost nineteen centuries.

At Eighteen.

You are eighteen years of age, are you not? Just so. That is the age when callow youth has his first attack of the big head. You imagine at this moment that you know it all. I observed by the cut of your trousers, the angle of your hat, the tip of your head, the style of your shoes and the wagger of your walk, that you are badly gone on yourself. This is an error of youth that your uncle can overlook, but it pains him sorely to hear you speak in terms of disrespect of one you should never, never mention save by the name father. He may not be up to your style in modern art of making a fool of himself, but ten to one he forgets more in one week than you will ever know. He may not enjoy smoking gutter-snipes chopped fine and inclosed in delicate paper, but he has borne a good many hard knocks for your interest, and deserves all the respect your shallow brain can muster. By and by, when you get through knowing it all and begin to learn something you will be ashamed to look in the glass, and you will wonder where the fool-killer kept himself when you were ripe for the sacrifice. Then when the old man grows tired of his journey, and stops to rest, and you fold his hands across his bosom and take a last look at the face that has grown beautiful in death you will feel a sting of regret that you ever spoke of him so grossly and disrespectfully; and when other sprouts of imbecility use the language that so delighted you in the germinal period of manhood you will feel like chasing them with a stick and crashing their skull to see if there is any brain tissue on the inside.—Bob Burdette.

Bible Questions.

Who dreamed that the sun, moon and stars bowed down to him?

What young man fell on his face before his prince and bowed himself three times?

What great chief welcomed some strangers to his tent by bowing before them to the ground?

Before what ruler's chariot did men run, crying "Bow the knee?"

What returning exile, trying to make peace with one whom he feared, bowed to the ground before him seven times?

When a man's chief business is to serve and please the Lord, all his circumstances become his servants.

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GASTRIC TROUBLES.

"I had suffered three years at least from gastric troubles. I could not sleep at night. My head ached and my feet would be cold as ice. My bowels were not regular and I was troubled with such cramps from gases forming on my stomach that I would faint away. I was in such pain that I would have sooner died than live. About three months ago I was suffering very badly when my body was tied up inwardly. My brother recommended Ripans Tabules to me. I went to a drug store and obtained some for me from the nearest drug store and I would not now be without them. They relieved me of all the foul gases that formed in my stomach and they move my bowels regularly for which I had been taking physics all the time. I have no more gases, my stomach is in good condition. I have no more headaches and can sleep well; in fact, I feel as light as the air. My friends say I look well and that is saying a good deal for a woman who weighs 190 pounds. I am sorry that I did not commence using the Tabules a year ago, for they would have saved me a great deal of pain and suffering."

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