

PAUL AND THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

On the road to Damascus, God called a hater of Christians to become an apostle of Jesus Christ. What happened to Paul is important for all Christians.

by Mike Bennett

QUIZ TIME

Why did Christians fear Paul at first?

QUIZ TIME

What did God mean when He told Paul, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads”?

The first time we meet Saul of Tarsus (who was later called Paul), he was part of the group who was killing Stephen for preaching about Jesus (Acts 7:57-60).

Not only did Paul think this faithful man deserved to die, he thought everyone who followed the way of Jesus Christ should be arrested and possibly face the death penalty as well.

PERSECUTING THE CHURCH

Paul then “made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (Acts 8:3). Members of the Church in Jerusalem fled to other areas to try to escape from Paul.

But he got permission to chase after them, even to Damascus! Paul would be able to arrest Christians there and drag them the long 140 miles back to Jerusalem.

Paul was the enemy of the Christians. He was probably the one they feared the most. But then came a miraculous event that drastically changed the course of Paul’s life.

ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

“As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’

“And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’

“Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads’” (Acts 9:3-5). A goad was a sharp stick used to prod cattle to move, so Jesus was telling him it was foolish to resist—that he was being like a stubborn ox in continuing to persecute Jesus’ followers in spite of the misgivings he must have been feeling.

In an instant, Paul’s whole point of view changed. He now knew that Jesus had come back to life and was his Master. Even though Paul was blinded by the light, for the first time he could really see. He had been blind spiritually, but God was beginning to open his eyes.

QUIZ TIME

What did Paul do after he repented and was baptized?

PAUL'S RESPONSE

“So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’

“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’” (verse 6). Paul’s companions, who had seen the light but hadn’t heard the words he heard (Acts 22:9), had to lead Paul by the hand. For three days he couldn’t see and he didn’t eat or drink.

Meanwhile, God broke the surprising news to a Christian named Ananias. God told Ananias to go to find “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” (verses 11-12).

Ananias was stunned! Had he heard correctly?

“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” (verses 13-14).

But God reassured Ananias that this was really part of His plan. He had an important mission for Paul. However, Paul, who had caused many people to suffer, would also have to suffer many things for the sake of Christ’s name.

Paul repented, was baptized, received the gift of God’s Holy Spirit and accepted the mission God gave him. He made a complete U-turn in his life.

“Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (verse 20). He began teaching the things that he would have killed others for saying just a few days before! No wonder “all who heard were amazed” (verse 21).

Paul’s calling on the road to Damascus became an important part of his story. The Bible records him telling it in detail to an angry crowd in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-21). He told it again when defending himself before King Agrippa and the Roman governor Festus (Acts 26:1-23). (Though some feel there are contradictions between the various accounts, a careful study shows that they are all complementary. For more on this, see [“Road to Damascus: a Bible Contradiction?”](#))

Paul also wrote often about the importance of God’s calling for every Christian. Each follower of Christ has a unique story of God’s calling, but essentially Christians have the same calling. As Paul wrote, God “has saved us and called us with a holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9).

THE CHRISTIAN CALLING

The Bible gives other examples of men and women being called to follow Christ, and most of their stories were not as dramatic as Paul’s. Most did not include physical miracles.

But everyone who is called by God does experience a spiritual miracle—the opening of his or her mind to understand God’s truth and calling. This miracle, though silent and invisible, is one of the greatest possible miracles. It gives us the chance to be part of the family of the all-powerful Creator God.

QUIZTIME

What happens to people who answer God's calling?

Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

People who answer this miraculous calling will be able to live forever as sons and daughters of God (2 Corinthians 6:18)!

For more about how God calls people to become followers of Christ, see the article "[God Calling!](#)" If you feel God is calling you, we encourage you to also download our free booklet *Change Your Life!* It describes the steps that God wants us to take to respond to His calling.



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