

GREAT EVENTS OF THE BIBLE --
THE CONVERSION OF
SAUL OF TARSUS!

(SLIDE #1) "GREAT EVENTS OF
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Introduction:

- A. Imagine The Most Heinous Enemy Of The United States Who Has Nothing In Mind But Causing Devastation And Destruction To Our Country!
 - 1. Osama Bin Laden or Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi -- both were killed.
 - 2. Imagine that person wanting to become a citizen of the U.S. -- We would reply, "NO WAY! He wouldn't WANT to be a citizen here; we wouldn't want him!"
- B. Imagine Saul Of Tarsus Becoming A Christian In The First Century!
 - 1. That would have been totally inconceivable.
 - 2. Any Christian's response would have been a sarcastic, "Yeah, right!" And any Jewish religious leader's response would have been a skeptical, "NO WAY IN THIS WORLD!"
- C. And Yet, Today's Lesson -- The Conversion Of Saul Of Tarsus.

I. (Slide #2) Saul's Terroristic Persecution Of The Church And Christians!

- A. In Our Last Lesson At The Martyrdom Of Stephen We Were Introduced To Saul.
 - 1. (Slide #3) Those who stoned Stephen laid their clothes at the feet of an up-and-coming prodigy, Saul of Tarsus. "and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul." Ac. 7:58
 - 2. This young Jewish zealot was trained by the great Pharisee educator, Gamaliel. Ac. 22:3
 - a. We were introduced to Gamaliel at the end of Ac. 5 when he tried to caution the angry Sanhedrin to be careful as they opposed Peter and John.
 - b. Ac. 5:34 "Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while."
 - 1. He was a member of the Sanhedrin.

2. Religiously he was a Pharisee.
 3. He was one of the greatly respected teachers of the Law of Moses.
 4. He taught strict obedience to the Law of Moses.
3. Saul was present at Stephen's stoning and consented to his death!
 - a. Ac. 8:1 "Now Saul was consenting to his death."
 - b. Later, as he told of his conversion, he acknowledged that he was there and told what he said to Jesus on the road to Damascus: Ac. 22:20 "And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him."
- B. He Became THE LEADING PERSECUTOR Of The Cause Of Christ!
1. Ac. 8:1,3 "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.....³As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison."
 - a. He became THE LEADING antagonist/terrorist against the Church and Christians!
 - b. Saul left Judea and went to Syria -- He was seeking Christians EVERYWHERE!
 1. Ac. 9:1,2 "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."
 2. The Jewish leaders gave Saul permission; he was a bulldog terrorist trying to root out Christian men AND women, to arrest, imprison, and murder Christians!
 3. He was their facilitator to carry out destruction of the Church and Christians!
 - c. His persecution was so much more dangerous than threats; he was eager to murder them!
 - d. Like a blood-thirsty animal, he went to the High Priest and sought orders that he might go as far as Damascus, arrest Christians, and bring them to Jerusalem. Ac. 9:1,2; Ac. 26:5
 - e. He was on a mission to eradicate Christianity from the face of the Earth!
 1. Ac. 22:4 "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,"
 2. Ac. 26:11 "And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities."

- C. Later In Life He Addressed His Murderous Attacks Against The Church.
1. When the Roman commander saved Saul from being killed by the angry mob in Jerusalem after his arrest, Paul asked to speak to them and he described his early life:
 - a. **(Slide #4)** Ac. 22:3-5 “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. ⁴I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, ⁵as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.”
 - b. **(►)** Ac. 22:19 “So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.’”
 2. **(►)** Years later when King Agrippa came to Caesarea and tried Paul, he said, “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. ¹¹And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities. ¹²While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,” Ac. 26:9-12
 3. **(Slide #5)** When he wrote the Galatian Christians, he told about his earlier life in Judaism: “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. ¹⁴And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” Gal. 1:13,14
 4. Paul described his early life to the Corinthians: “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” I Cor. 15:9
 5. Later he told Timothy about how grateful he was to be a minister, although he knew that privilege was SO undeserved: “although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man;” I Tim. 1:13
- D. WHAT CHRISTIAN COULD POSSIBLY Think About This Man Becoming A Christian? What Christian Could POSSIBLY Trust Him?

II. (Slide #6) Saul Confronted By Jesus On The Road To Damascus!

A. Imagine The Diametrically Opposite Emotions That Occurred On This Road!

1. Saul is focused, driven, and determined to find and arrest the Christians and take them to Jerusalem to be imprisoned!
2. In an instant, he is perplexed, fearful, confused, cowering, and his whole belief system was turned upside down!
3. Ac. 9:3-7 “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ ⁵And 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.*’ ⁶So 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.’ ⁷And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.”
4. (Slide #7) He described this event to the mob in Jerusalem: **Ac. 22:6-11** “Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. ⁷And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ ⁸So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ ⁹And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. ¹⁰So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’ ¹¹And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.”
5. And he told King Agrippa and Festus about that event: Ac. 26:13-18 “at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*’ ¹⁵So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. ¹⁷I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ¹⁸to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

6. He also very succinctly told the Corinthians that he SAW the Lord Jesus! I Cor. 9:1 “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?”

B. Facts About This Event:

1. Saul was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians; he was nearing the city.
2. **(Slide #8)** About noon, a bright light, brighter than the sun, shone upon him. [Like a bolt of lightning!]
3. He and all those traveling with him fell to the ground.
4. Jesus, speaking in Hebrew, asked Saul, “WHY are you persecuting me?”
 - a. He friends saw the light.
 - b. However, they did not hear what Jesus said to him.
5. Saul, not knowing who was speaking, asked, “Who are you Lord?”
 - a. This was NOT an affirmation that Jesus was his Lord!
 - b. He just knew that it was someone who was much greater than he was!
6. Jesus’ reply: “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.”
7. Saul, trembling asked, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”
8. Jesus told him to “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”
 - a. Ac. 22:10 “there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.”
 - b. Ac. 26:16-13 “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. ¹⁷I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ¹⁸to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”
9. Because Saul was blinded by the light, his friends led him by the hand into Damascus.

III. (Slide #9) Saul's Conversion.

A. Texts:

1. Ac. 9:8-26 "Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰Now 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.' ¹¹So 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. ¹²And 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.' ¹³Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' ¹⁵But 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. ¹⁶For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.' ¹⁷And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁸Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. ¹⁹So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. ²¹Then 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?' ²²But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ. ²³Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ²⁴But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. ²⁵Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket."
2. (Slide #10) Ac. 22:12-16 "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, ¹³came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. ¹⁴Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. ¹⁵For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'"

B. Blinded Saul Was Led By His Colleagues Into Damascus.

- C. This Heart-Stricken And Remorseful Penitent Did Not Eat A Bit Or Drink A Drop For Three Days!
- D. The Lord, In A Vision, Called Ananias, A Devout Jew, To Go To The House Of Judas On Straight Street And Seek Saul Who Was Praying.
 - 1. He is told that Saul has seen a vision of a man named Ananias coming to him, laying his hands on him, and restoring his vision.
 - 2. Ananias told the Lord, "I have heard about this man and how he has persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem. Too, I have heard that he has come to Damascus with authority from the chief priests to arrest all of the Christians here."
 - 3. The Lord told Ananias that he had a mission for Saul -- to bear the name of Christ to Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. And this former persecutor of the Church will face intense persecution himself!
- E. Ananias Obediently Went To Straight Street, Laid Hands Upon Him And Restored His Sight.
- F. Ananias Called Upon This Penitent Believer To Arise And Be Baptized; Saul Did So Immediately -- His Sins Were Washed Away In Baptism As He "Called Upon The Lord" For Salvation.
 - 1. He was NOT a Christian, he was not saved before his baptism!
 - 2. Ananias calling him "Brother Saul" is NOT saying that he was already saved! He is a fellow Jew with Ananias.
 - 3. Saul was certainly a penitent believer! The Lord appearing to him and blinding him shook him to his core! His action -- not eating or drinking, certainly indicate remorse and penitence!
 - 4. Ananias restored his sight; then he told Him that the Lord had a mission for Saul! God chose Saul to know His Will, to see Jesus and hear His voice, and then to be a witness to all men of what he had seen and heard!
 - 5. **(Slide #11)** Then Saul arose and was baptized to wash away his sins -- in that action he was "calling upon the Lord to save him;" he realized how SINFUL he was and how salvation could only be received from this awesome Lord Jesus!
 - 6. Afterward, he received nourishment and was strengthened.

7. He fellowshiped with the Christians in Damascus and immediately preached the Gospel Message, that Jesus IS the Christ, the Son of God in the Jewish synagogue.
8. People in Damascus were amazed! They knew that he was the former persecutor!
9. Saul increased in strength and confounded the Jews as he declared that Jesus IS the Christ!

IV. (Slide #12) Events After His Conversion.

- A. (►) Christians In Damascus Received Him As A Brother!
- B. (►) A Few Days Later, The Jews Plotted To Kill Saul; They Watched Every Gate To Make Sure That He Did Not Escape! **(Slide #13)** However, His New Christian Brethren Helped Him Escape The Plot To Kill Him; At Night They Took Him To A Window In The Wall And Lowered Him Down The Side Of The Wall In A Large Basket.
 1. The Christians, realizing that every gate was being constantly monitored, took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall in a large basket so he could escape this death threat! Ac. 9:25
 2. The Christians concluded that the only way for Saul to escape was for them to use a hole in the wall and to let him down in a basket.
 3. When did this event occur?
 - a. It may have occurred quite soon after his conversion.
 - b. Many commentators, citing Gal. 1:17,18, affirm that it occurred three years after his conversion.
 1. However, that is not what the text states.
 2. Paul, in affirming that his “gospel” was authentic explained that he was converted in Damascus; he did not go to Jerusalem; in fact he went to Arabia (for how long we do not know); then he returned to Damascus and three years after coming to Damascus to persecute Christians, he finally made a trip to Jerusalem where he spent fifteen days and saw Peter and James, the Lord’s brother, but none of the other Apostles. Gal. 1:17-20
 3. I personally believe this event, the Jews trying to kill Saul, occurred VERY SOON after his conversion and his proclamation of the Gospel; his former allies DETESTED him and his message; they had to get rid of him immediately! His former Jewish allies were enraged that he, their “Goliath”, had become a traitor to their cause!

B. (Slide #14) The Lord's Preparation Of Saul In Arabia.

1. After the Jews persecuted him, he fled to Arabia. Gal. 1:16,17 "to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus."
 - a. Some think he may have been in Arabia for as long as 3 years.
 - b. Paul is explaining that he did not get his message from other inspired men; it came directly from God!
2. In I Cor. 2, Paul explains that his preaching was given directly by the Holy Spirit!

C. (►) Christians In Jerusalem Rejoiced To Hear Of Saul's Conversion!

1. Christians in Jerusalem had not seen Paul since his conversion; however, they rejoice in it!
2. Gal. 1:23,24 "But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to* destroy.' ²⁴And they glorified God in me."

D. (►) Saul Returns To Jerusalem; The Leery Reaction Of The Brethren Toward Him.

1. Gal. 1:18,19 "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother."
2. Ac. 9:26-31 "And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. ²⁹And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. ³⁰When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. ³¹Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied."

V. (Slide #15) Great Truths From The Conversion Of Saul:

A. (►) People Can Be Totally Convinced That Doing Wrong Is Right And It May Be TOTALLY Wrong!

1. All the time Saul was persecuting Christians he was 100% convinced that he was doing the will of God!
2. Ac. 23:1 “Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, ‘Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.’”

B. (►) You NEVER KNOW Who Has A Receptive Heart To The Gospel And What Great Things They May Do For The Lord’s Cause! Give Them The Opportunity To Hear And To Respond To The Gospel!

C. (►) The Impact Of This Conversion:

1. (►) Saul was saved! Seething Saul became powerful preaching Paul!
 - a. One can certainly outlive a past life of sin and become a dynamic child of God.
 - b. WHAT A CONVERSION!
2. (►) The Gospel Message was taught in Jewish synagogues everywhere he traveled!
3. (►) He was the messenger of God for the Gentiles!
4. (►) He took the Gospel to the known world at that time.
5. (►) During his Missionary Journeys, Paul wrote 14 books of the N.T. encouraging congregations and individuals to be loyal to Christ and to His Will! His faith, his life, his heart, his love for the Church And his evangelistic zeal are stamped upon almost the rest of the N.T.!

D. (Slide #16) Later: The Persecutor Became The Viciously Persecuted!

1. Promise of persecution by the Lord: Ac. 9:16 “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”
2. Immediate persecution: Ac. 9:23-25 “Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ²⁴But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. ²⁵Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.”
3. (Slide #17) Later persecutions:
 - a. Stoned at Lystra.
 - b. Followed everywhere by opponents.
 - c. Beaten.
 - d. Imprisoned.

- E. Sinners Who Are Not Baptized Need To Examine Saul's Response To The Gospel -- His Penitence, Faith, And Baptism!
1. See how true faith immediately prompted him to obey the Lord!
 2. "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."
 3. Do it NOW!!