

Come to Understanding

**They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24**

February 14, 2010

Volume 9 Number 4

The Changing of Saul into Paul

There is a famously quoted Scripture which Paul wrote to the Philippians. He said that as he is strengthened by the Messiah (Christ), he can do all things:

13 I can do all things through the Messiah which strengthens me. -Philippians 4

Ironically, Paul wrote this in the context of reminding the Philippians that this strength had nothing to do with his physical state:

11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatever state I am, *therewith* to be content.

12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. -Philippians 4

Paul knew what he was talking about because he had lived both lives. He had lived a highly esteemed and prosperous life, as well as one marked by extreme suffering in a state of great humility. Nevertheless, he was instructed in “every where and in all things.”

During his time of worldly prosperity, Paul’s name was Saul. He knew what it meant to trust in his flesh, calling himself a “Hebrew of Hebrews.” As a Pharisee, Saul was thoroughly taught in the religious laws of the Jews. Believing himself to be a blameless keeper of the law, he sought to further add to his own righteousness by persecuting those Jews who had become convinced that Yahshua (Jesus) was the promised Messiah:

4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinks that he has whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the congregation; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. -Philippians 3

During the height of his work as a zealous persecutor, Saul worked under the direct authority of the Jewish high priest. He was given the authority to enter into the synagogues of Damascus to drag out faithful men and women and haul them off to Jerusalem to be persecuted:

1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. -Acts 9

Then, as Saul set out to carry out his plans, his whole life suddenly changed! He saw a light from heaven and fell to the ground, hearing a voice that called him by name:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecute you me? -Acts 9

According to a latter account of this event, the voice spoke to Saul in the Hebrew language:

14 And when we had all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking to me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecute you me? *it is hard for you to kick against the pricks.* -Acts 26

[Even though the Bible clearly states that Yahshua spoke Hebrew (the Greek word for Hebrew is εβραϊς (Hebrais) in the biblical texts), many scholars say this is incorrect and that the word should be translated as “Aramaic,” which was the Syrian language from Babylon, as it is in some modern Bibles. However, contrary to popular opinions, Aramaic did not become the primary language of the Jews in Israel until after 200 A.D. (see Douglas Hamp, *Discovering the Language of Jesus: Hebrew or Aramaic?*, Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishers, 2005, p. 22.) Furthermore, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, most of which were written in Hebrew, document that Hebrew was a living language during the time of Yahshua and into the second century. (see Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2001, p. 119.)]

It was the resurrected Messiah, speaking Hebrew, who revealed Himself to Saul as “Yahshua!”

15 And I said, Who are you, Lord? And he said, I am Yahshua whom you persecute. -Acts 26

Saul was never the same! This powerful Pharisee, who called himself a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” suffered a humiliating blindness that lasted for three days and three nights!

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. -Acts 9

Saul had been chosen for a special purpose. He was to carry Yahshua’s name, not only to the children of Israel, but also to kings, and even to the Gentiles!

**So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8**

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15 But the Lord said to him, Go your way: for he is a chosen vessel to me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: -Acts 9

Saul was chosen to help fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah:

8 The Lord Yahweh which gathers the outcasts of Israel says, Yet will I gather *others* to him, besides those that are gathered unto him. -Isaiah 56

It was while Saul's physical eyes were blinded that his spiritual eyes were opened! Afterward, his natural eyes were healed also:

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Yahshua, that appeared to you in the way as you came, has sent me, that you might receive your sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight immediately, and arose, and was baptized. -Acts 9

Then Saul was called to help open the spiritual eyes of the Gentiles and deliver them from the power of Satan through forgiveness of sins and sanctification by faith in Yahshua:

18 To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. -Acts 26

Once he received back his strength, Saul continued on his journey to Damascus. This time, however, it was to preach the very Gospel he had previously despised!

19 And when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

20 And immediately he preached the Messiah in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. -Acts 9

However, Yahshua gave this sobering caution about Saul's calling:

16 For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. -Acts 9

Saul's time of plenty had ended. God had sent him down another road. In the process of proclaiming the name of Yahshua, he was going to learn the things he was now destined to suffer because of that name!

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That suffering soon began. Saul's own people, the Jews, quickly turned against him:

23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

24 But their lying in wait was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. -Acts 9

Saul escaped and returned to Jerusalem. However, not only were the Jews after him, but even the other disciples of Yahshua didn't trust him and were afraid of him (see Acts 9:26). Finally, Saul was befriended by an apostle named Barnabas, who accompanied him in his ministry:

28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

29 And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Yahshua, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. -Acts 9

Even though Saul had become the common enemy of both the Jews and the Greeks, the Holy Ghost called him, along with Barnabas, to minister to the Greeks in Cyprus.

It was there that a government official named Sergius Paulus (Paul) asked them if he could hear the Word of God. However, a Jewish sorcerer named Barjesus (meaning the "son of Jesus" and who was also called "Elymas") was with Paulus, trying to turn him away from the faith:

7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. -Acts 13

That was when the Holy Ghost moved upon Saul. He set his eyes upon the sorcerer, declaring him to be a "child of the devil" and an "enemy of all righteousness:"

10 And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, *you* child of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? -Acts 13

Saul, who himself had once been physically blinded by God to open his eyes to the spiritual truth of the Word of God, told the sorcerer that the "hand of the Lord" is upon you and you shall be blind "for a season!"

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord *is upon* you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. -Acts 13

Witnessing the miraculous power of God over the sorcerer, Sergius Paulus (Paul) believed the Gospel!

12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. -Acts 13

The name of "Saul," which was also the name of the first King of Israel, means "desired." However, Saul knew that the strength he used over that "child of the devil" was not his own. It was the power of the Holy Ghost through Yahshua the Messiah! Thereafter, Saul put aside his boastful name and adopted the humble name, "Paul," meaning "small or little."