

The Conversion of Paul



Dear Friends

For our morning and evening worships at home over the last few months, we have been reading through the Conflict of the Ages set again, starting off with Patriarchs and Prophets, and reading the companion Scriptures to the chapters. We are currently in the book Acts of the Apostles reading of Paul's ministry.

There is no doubt that the ministry of Paul has a huge impact on the New Testament writings, enduring through to our day, but Paul didn't begin like that. He had a very different beginning, so great that he wasn't even Paul, but Saul.

From who he was, an incorrigible opponent to the early believers and one set with great determination and with all the support he needed to crush this infant tiny bud of a church, Jesus did not leave him to the destination he was headed, both spiritually and physically. He intervened in the life of this enthusiastic worker against the cause of the gospel, and gave all the needed evidence of His power for Saul to make his choices.

Saul reacted to the presence of Jesus with awe and reverence and faithfully responded to the call. As a consequence of those choices on the road to Damascus, he became the greatest of the apostles.

"From among the most bitter and relentless persecutors of the church of Christ, arose the ablest defender and most successful herald of the gospel." — Sketches from the Life of Paul. p.9

With the knowledge of his past, the persecution he inflicted upon God's true disciples, which after his conversion he knew was so wrong, it would always keep him humble with a feeling of unworthiness. Because of God's grace to him, he would always understand God's grace for every other soul on earth as well.

With his conversion, Paul was a powerful catalyst to thrust the little fledgling church forward into the Christian era. This is what God needed, a champion of a man to stand up though the heavens fall and proclaim the present truth that Jesus had risen and basically take the Righteousness by Faith message from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the world even amidst the bitterest opposition of his own people.

"As Saul thus boldly preached Jesus, he exerted a powerful influence. He had a knowledge of the Scriptures, and after his conversion a divine light shone upon the prophecies

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—Acts of the Apostles,
p.167,168





"With the Spirit of God resting upon him, he would in clear manner carry his hearers, down through the prophecies to the time of Christ's first advent and show them that the Scriptures had been fulfilled which referred to His sufferings and resurrection."

—Early Writings, p.201,202

concerning Jesus, which enabled him clearly and boldly to present the truth and to correct any perversion of the Scriptures.

"With the Spirit of God resting upon him, he would in clear manner carry his hearers down through the prophecies to the time of Christ's first advent and show them that the scriptures had been fulfilled which referred to His sufferings, death, and resurrection." — Early Writings, p.201,202

A Step Back

So let's take some time to step backwards and cover the period of Saul persecuting the new Church, then to the experience on the Damascus Road, to meet up with Ananias and the beginning of Paul's might ministry.

Saul was born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia. He was what was known as a Hellenistic Jew, but he was not like the typical Jew of his type. He had come to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel, a very influential and well respected Pharisee at the time. As a Pharisee, he was very strict and orthodox and his fervour carried him to the point of fanaticism which is why he was willing to consent to the death of Stephen.

"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." — Acts 26:9-11

In I Corinthians 1:23, he declares that the gospel was a stumbling block to the Jews, they didn't comprehend the reality of Christ. Jesus didn't fit the traditional expectation of a king. Anyone who would be hung on the cross would have to be under God's curse. To the Jews, crucifixion was a grotesque method of torturing one to death, certainly not fitting for One who claimed to be the Son of God. No, the new Christian church's claim that Jesus was the chosen Messiah was completely false and they were completely deluded.

Saul was definitely one of them. The Jews living outside of Jerusalem lived in a sort of a network with the headquarters in Jerusalem. They had synagogues in different localities, all supporting and being supported by Jerusalem. Communication was kept up between the great centre and the outlying towns and villages. Saul had knowledge of the work of Ananias and had full authority of Jerusalem to squash this work in Damascus.

A valuable lesson for us here. Have we ever been pursuing a direction only to learn we were zealous in the wrong direction and have had to change course? This following quote has meaning – both to Saul's experience and for our own experience.

"Paul says, 'I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth' (Acts 26:9). But this belief did not make his course right. When Paul received the gospel of Jesus Christ, it made him a new creature. He was transformed; the truth planted in his soul gave him such faith and courage as a follower of Christ that no opposition could move him, no suffering daunt him.

"Men may make what excuse they please for their rejection of God's law; but no excuse will be accepted in the Day of Judgment. Those who are contending with God and strengthening their guilty souls in transgression must very soon meet the Great Lawgiver over His broken law...

"God will not far hence arise to deal with the sinner. Will the false shepherd shield the transgressor in that day? Can he be excused who went with the multitude in the path of disobedience? Will popularity or numbers make any guiltless? These are questions which the careless and indifferent should consider and settle for themselves." — Faith and Works, p.33





On The Damascus Road

"And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink." —Acts 9:3-9

These words of Scripture are well known and have been read and quoted over and over many, many times when describing of one of the most amazing conversion experiences.

"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." These words from Jesus Himself have a profound meaning. When one does kick against the pricks, ultimately they hurt. If they don't break off, they remain to hurt again and again when one kicks at them, but if they do break off, then they are stuck in the boot, or worse still, in the foot.

There was more in the meaning of kicking against the pricks that Jesus was relating. Saul, was kicking at Jesus' by persecuting His followers, He was trying to cripple the work of the infant new church that Jesus Himself was starting to establish. That church was going ahead regardless of Saul's actions, and all Saul's fighting and kicking against it was not going to delay the work going forward at all.

But Jesus knew Saul's heart and gave him the greatest evidence that He was alive and the manifestation of His divine power was the every evidence Paul would need – and he accepted it. Now instead of kicking against the pricks of trying to stop the unstoppable of the gospel going forward, Saul could be a wheel in the machinery to roll it forward, without at least his hindrance.

Visit With Ananias

"And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" —Acts 9:6

This question from Saul at the moment of Divine intervention, indicates that he realised that he was talking to a much greater power than he had jurisdiction over. His physical being was affected by this power. Immediately he relinquished his own pride and stubbornness and gave it up to Jesus, "What wilt thou have me to do?"

Jesus gave explicit and detailed instruction as to what Saul was to do and where he was to go. "And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." —Acts 9:6

But Saul was not the only one given explicit and detailed instruction. Ananias was also given a vision, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight." —Acts 9:11,12

Ananias obviously knew about this Saul of Tarsus, "Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name." —Acts 9:13,14

But Jesus continued His instruction to Ananias, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." —Acts 9:15,16

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"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was it taught me, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

—Galatians 1:11,12

Ananias did not know that Saul had had an encounter with Jesus – a complete turn-around and conversion experience that would change his life forever. He came out of Jerusalem as an apostle for the Sanhedrin, but came into the gates of Damascus as a personally chosen apostle for Jesus Christ.

"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)... But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." —Galatians 1:1,11,12

Could this lesson possibly help us to learn that some people we may see as hopeless write-offs, may become very capable and effective apostles to further God's work?

The Beginning of Paul's Ministry

Although we don't read of Saul's name changing from Saul to Paul until Acts 13:9, but from his conversion, he certainly would be entitled to the name Paul.

The name Saul means – destroyer.

The name Paul means – worker.

From the very beginning of his conversion experience, Paul remained in Damascus and started right into ministry in his new-found faith in Jesus Christ. He did spend a few days with the disciples in Damascus, but virtually immediately he went, of all places, to the synagogue to preach. "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." —Acts 9:20

This was obviously going to raise controversy, as he was going to preach the very opposite to what he had done in the past. Those of the synagogue were expecting favourable results from his visit, but now this?

"But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." —Acts 9:21,22

This was all just too much, the Jews just could not believe their ears. So much it got their ire up that they sought to take good care of him! And they immediately laid plans to prevent him from leaving town and plotted his death. "And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him." —Acts 9:23,24

From here, it reads that Paul was let down the wall in a basket and went on his way, not straight to Jerusalem, but to Arabia to think all the preceding events through.

"Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days." —Galatians 1:17,18

Time of Solitude

"Here, in the solitude of the desert, Paul had ample opportunity for quiet study and meditation. He calmly reviewed his past experience and made sure work of repentance. He sought God with all his heart, resting not until he knew for a certainty that his repentance was accepted and his sin pardoned. He longed for the assurance that Jesus would be with him in his coming ministry. He emptied his soul of the prejudices and traditions that had hitherto shaped his life, and received instruction from the Source of truth. Jesus communed with him and established him in the faith, bestowing upon him a rich measure of wisdom and grace." —Acts of the Apostles, p.125

Saul's original target when he left Jerusalem with letters from the high priest, was to exterminate the Jewish believers in Damascus in the synagogue if he found any of this persuasion.



Now, after coming back from Arabia, he finally made it back to the synagogues in Jerusalem, now not to arrest believers, but to increase their numbers; not to slander Jesus as an impostor, but to present Him as the Messiah – the Christ.

Paul would meet mighty challenges, Jesus talking to Ananias told him of Paul; "For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." —Acts 9:16

Opposition, persecution and suffering from various antagonists would pursue his journey from here on in, but due to his amazing convicting conversion, nothing would shake his faith or call to duty, despite the actual hardship and trials that would come upon him in his new life in Jesus Christ.

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." —II Corinthians 4:7-10

In all this, what encouragement can we take away from this lesson to help us face the hardships and discouragements in our trials?

Our Encouragement

"Stripes and imprisonment, cold and hunger and thirst, perils by land and by sea, in the city and in the wilderness, from his own countrymen, from the heathen, and from false brethren – all this he endured for the sake of the gospel. He was 'defamed, reviled,' made 'the offscouring of all things, perplexed, persecuted, troubled on every side, in jeopardy every hour, alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake...'

"Amidst the constant storm of opposition, the clamor of enemies, and the desertion of friends the intrepid apostle almost lost heart. But he looked back to Calvary and with new ardor pressed on to spread the knowledge of the Crucified. He was but treading the blood-stained path that Christ had trodden before him. He sought no discharge from the warfare till he should lay off his armor at the feet of his Redeemer." — Acts of the Apostles, p.296,297

When one reads of the life and ministry of Paul, he was a master worker. He gave and gave of himself to visit and plant churches. In our thinking, when we think of visiting areas and doing some outreach, even establishing churches, we think if a relatively short time of perhaps a week or two, but Paul spent years in some of these cities. He established the church, prepared leaders for them, and even when he had departed, he still wrote to them, encouraging them, correcting creeping heresies that had sneaked in. He had those people at heart.

Out of his Saul experience, he certainly responded to his Damascus Road experience with a solemn turn around, and not only became Paul, as good worker, but he became one of the greatest evangelists this world has known.

Some thoughts we could well consider, as we close off;

What we consider right in our minds may not be right at all.

We may be doing our own inventions, instead of doing God's will.

We have great need to refer to Scripture and the words of Jesus to verify our belief.

We need to remember God does not need us, but we surely do need Him!

God be with you all, dear friends. May you all read and learn from Paul's experience and make it your own.

Doug Hurley

"Amidst the constant storm of opposition, the clamour of enemies, and the desertion of friends, the intrepid apostle almost lost heart. But he looked back to Calvary and with new ardor pressed on to spread the knowledge of the Crucified."

— Acts of the Apostles, p.297





For Sharing



This large inflatable image of the Daniel 2 statue is available to support outreach efforts.

It is 8 meters tall and can be used to garner the public's attention, start a conversation and invite people to an event or offer.

It is currently in the possession of Autumn Leaves and if you have a project for it then contact us to discuss a loan of it for your projects.

In the Office

Autumn is really our time of year! It is when we get back into the year after a busy summer with camps and everything that involves. We have had ongoing orders for Bibles, health and outreach books.

With the end of the financial year just past we have also sent our Donation summaries for NZ donors who may be able to claim back tax. If you have not received yours from us and were expecting it or if you would like to learn more about this, be in touch!

Video Production: The subscribers on our YouTube channel have doubled this year. With the increase of visibility on our digital platform, the content we share is being spread further abroad reaching many more people with the gospel message. Every Friday a new video is added. Check out our YouTube channel here:
www.youtube.com/autumnleavesnz

Free Offers: We have found that an effective way to scatter autumn leaves and get material into the hands of New Zealanders, has been to advertising on social media. Each month we generally have a different free offer available as well as a free offer web page with key books available all the time.

Some of the feedback and comments have been so encouraging. Not only do they read the books themselves, but share them with family and friends, and some ending up being sent overseas.

Since we started this project back in 2021 we have sent out nearly 5,000 books.

This advertising is effective because only people who are interested in the books and topics receive it.

How can you help? Sometimes it's difficult to know where to start with doing outreach, and sharing the gospel. We encourage you to purchase the books yourself and personally share Jesus with those who you come in contact with, but we know circumstances can sometimes make this difficult, and so if you have a desire to share, this project is a great way for you to be able to personally support the gospel commission (found in Matthew 28:19,20) locally here in New Zealand.



As with any project there are expenses. We thank those who have generously given to this project and their ongoing support to be able to supply outreach books into the hands of New Zealanders. We have had generous donations to pay for the advertising, as well as individuals offering to pay for all the books and postage that a sent out in a particular month.

We invite you to pray for this project as books are being scattered like Autumn Leaves throughout New Zealand.

If you have an interest to contribute financially to this ongoing monthly project, we would love to hear from you. For more information visit:

www.autumnleaves.co.nz/projects/freebookoffers





Events

Australian Camp: The recent camp meeting located at Crawford, Queensland was a peak of spiritual blessing and was well attended, with increased numbers on Sabbath, including community members. The food and fellowship were excellent, fostering a strong sense of united spirit throughout the camp. There is considerable interest in organizing another event.



Friday Night Live: Our next live-from-studio event will be the popular Friday Night Live on May 30, 7pm. This is a time of singing and devotion where you have the requests and join with our local singers to enjoy an evening of fellowship and joy together. Put it in your calendar now!

North Island Trip: During May, Doug and Angela will be traveling in the North Island up as far as the Waikato for visitations and a few speaking appointments.

- Sabbath May 24 Dannevirke,

- Sabbath May 31 Papamoa

Be in touch to connect, or if you would like any orders brought up to save on postage, please have your orders in before May 21.



Projects

Blue Bible Project: This project has been very busy! Over 11,600 Bibles arrived at the beginning of the year and we are now down to about 4,000. This Blue Bible project aims to produce and distribute an ideal sharing Bible with good features and low prices. With good size print and approximately 150 additional pages of study aids and Bible information, these Bibles have been received with excitement and scattered widely. We have mainly aimed to supply New Zealand but have also sent to the US, The Carribean, Ireland, the Pacific Islands and Australia.



We are still aiming to raise the remaining funds to keep the subsidised pricing of these Bibles. Approximately the same percentage of funding has been raised as Bibles that have been distributed. With just over \$16k left to raise, these Bibles can continue to be so economical that anyone can afford to purchase them to share. There are plans for another printing soon.

Funding Progress

Raised so far \$33,675.18 \$16,325 to raise

Building Project: Due to our accounting system switch later last year we had double calculated some contributions on our last couple of updates. This is now corrected and while it appears our figures have gone backward, we have actually made a little (just over \$2000) progress to completing this fund. Thank you to those who continue to contribute - it makes a difference!

Funding Progress

\$83.3k to raise Raised so far \$1,506,180.22

Spirit of Prophecy

The Great Controversy



The Great Controversy pulls back the curtain on the past, present, and future. Even in the midst of this chaotic world, we can see God's hand at work, allowing the end-time events to move forward to completion. We need not be frightened because God has given us everything we need to know for this time. Comprehending this truth will cause the fear to vanish.

In this beautifully crafted, hardcover edition, you'll find exquisite illustrations and a ribbon marker. Not only will it elegantly grace any library shelf or mantle, but its message also will resonate in the depths of hearts. Do not let the covers of this magnificent writing remain closed. Cherish the significance of its words.

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"Except a man be born from above, he can not see the kingdom of God.."

—John 3:3

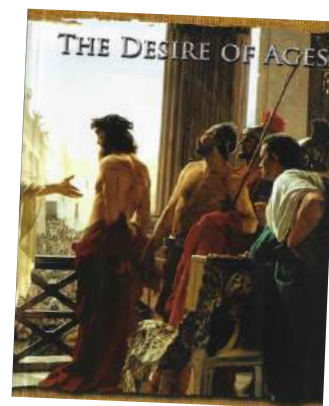
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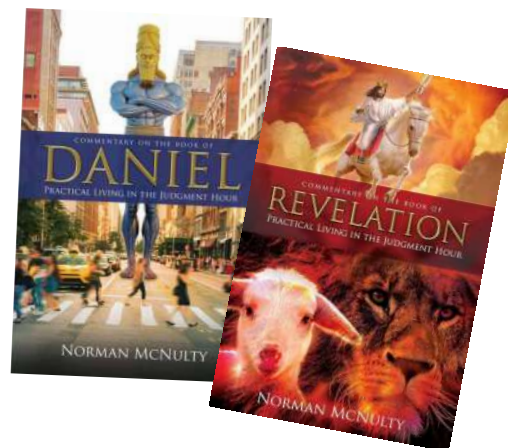
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The Leaflet is the newsletter of Autumn Leaves NZ Limited, a registered charitable company, with the purpose of scattering God's message of truth like the leaves of autumn.



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