

# A Hebrew of Hebrews

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from Internet Sources)

## Introduction:

- A. Acts 9:1-5; Phil. 3:4-6; Gal. 1:13-14 - A Pharisee filled with anger and hate
  - 1. Saul of Tarsus: temple assassin, Pharisee par excellence, model Jew destined to be second only to the high priest in Jerusalem
  - 2. Became the apostle Paul: who started most of the churches in Europe and Asia Minor at that time, endured torture for the gospel, wrote half of the books in the New Testament, and became second only to Christ in terms of influence in the church
  - 3. Acts 22:14-15; 1Cor. 15:9-10
- B. Paul was not always a Christian.
  - 1. Saul of Tarsus was zealous Jew.
  - 2. Saul of Tarsus hated the name of Jesus Christ.
  - 3. Saul of Tarsus hated the Gospel.
  - 4. Saul of Tarsus hated the doctrine of the resurrection of Gentiles.
  - 5. Saul of Tarsus hated the church.
  - 6. Saul of Tarsus was a murderer.
  - 7. Saul of Tarsus was a lost man bound for perdition
- C. Consider the perspective of the early church toward Saul of Tarsus
  - 1. How many people in the early church believed Saul of Tarsus would hear the gospel and be saved?
  - 2. How would they pray about Saul: please protect us from him, or please help him come to the truth?
  - 3. How many would have viewed him as an unredeemable reprobate?
  - 4. Do you suppose anyone in the early church loved Saul of Tarsus?
- D. The account of Saul's life is the greatest testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and of the power of the Gospel
  - 1. There is hope for all of the difficult cases: loved ones, coworkers, neighbors, opponents, political figures
  - 2. The Gospel, prayers, and the Providence of God have the same power today that they had on the day Saul of Tarsus was baptized by Ananias

## I. Acts 9:1-3 - PROBLEMS IN SAUL'S LIFE

- A. Self-Righteousness - To be a righteous Pharisee, it is mandated that one be self-righteous - Acts 23:1, 26:5; 1Tim. 1:13.
  - 1. Saul loved the law, studied it in Hebrew college, obeyed it strictly; the law was his life.
  - 2. Acts 26:4-5 - He called on his enemies to verify his righteousness as a Pharisaic Jew
  - 3. The problem with Saul's relationship with the Law was the fact that he trusted his obedience to the Law to save his soul. Saul believed keeping the Law would buy favor with God, and that God would accept him, and grant him salvation because he had earned it.
  - 4. Salvation was not given to us by means of our good works

- a. No one is saved by good works - Eph. 2:8-9
  - b. No one is saved by keeping the law of Moses - Rom. 3:20
  - c. No one is saved by righteous deeds - Titus 3:5
- 5. Anyone basing their hope of heaven on perfectly keeping the Law of God is deceiving themselves - James 2:10
- 6. No New Testament writer addressed the grace and mercy of God, the blood of Jesus Christ, and the power of the gospel more than Paul. Perhaps it is because after trying righteousness by perfect works keeping as a self-righteous Pharisee, he was overwhelmed with joy by the gospel of grace and mercy - Rom. 7:24-25
- B. Sinfulness - Saul of Tarsus would have claimed to have lived in all good conscience, but other murderers and blasphemers have said the same thing.
  - 1. 1Tim. 1:13; Acts 9:1
  - 2. His conscience might have been clear, but his law-keeping was flawed
  - 3. Ex. 20:13; Lev. 19:18
  - 4. No matter how hard he worked, no matter how much good he did for the Law of Moses with a clear conscience, no matter how many rules he kept, Saul of Tarsus was still a lost sinner who needed a Savior.
- C. Spite - Saul had heard of the Gospel and wanted no part of it. He refused to believe in Jesus, and he became enraged against those who did. It made him a cruel man - Acts 26:11
  - 1. Saul hated Jesus Christ and the Gospel of salvation through Him
  - 2. Saul hated Jesus because He claimed to be the Son of God, the Messiah, and the only way to salvation.
  - 3. He hated the Gospel because the Gospel claimed that Jesus died for sin on the cross and that He rose from the dead. The official story of the Jews was that the disciples stole the dead body of Jesus - Matt. 28:15
  - 4. Consider Saul's reaction to the preaching of the Gospel:
    - a. Acts 7:58 - He participated in the stoning of Stephen.
    - b. Acts 8:1 - He took responsibility for Stephen's death.
    - c. Acts 8:3 - He tried to destroy the church
    - d. Acts 8:3 - He broke into homes and dragged Christians away for trial and execution
    - e. Acts 9:1 - He publicly threatened believers.
    - f. Acts 9:1 - He murdered believers.
    - g. Acts 9:1-2 - He solicited warrants from the Jewish authorities authorizing him to harass and arrest Christians.
    - h. Acts 26:9 - He did everything he could to oppose Christ.
    - i. Acts 26:10 - He testified against believers and facilitated their murders.
    - j. Acts 26:11 - Saul tortured believers until they blasphemed the Lord who saved them
  - 5. Don't misunderstand. Saul had faith; just in the wrong things
    - a. He had faith in his own goodness, his own righteousness, in the Law, and in his ability to keep it.
    - b. Saul was a man much feared by the early church - Acts 9:13, 26

## **II. Acts 9:3-6 - POWER OF GOD OVER SAUL**

- A. How the Lord confronted him - In an instant, Saul's life as he knew it is over.
  - 1. He was literally knocked off of his high horse. Leading a party of temple assassins, carrying letters with authority second only to Caesar's, filled with confidence in his own righteousness and hatred for Christians; he is prostrated in the dust and blinded by the glory of the Christ he was insolently opposing
  - 2. You could not possibly script a better confrontation or a more complete humiliation or a greater epiphany
  - 3. Leave vengeance and vindication up to God; no one does it better! Just imagine what is waiting for the opponents of Christ today
- B. How the Lord convicted him - In an instant, Saul goes from the high priest's right hand to the level of a dumb ox - Acts 9:5
  - 1. Jesus is saying that their relationship, whether Saul wanted to believe it or not, was that of a herdsman using a sharp stick to prod a stubborn cow into the milking stall
  - 2. The Lord is saying, I am going to use you. Now you can cooperate and be blessed, or you can fight me and get hurt.
  - 3. What is going through Saul's mind? Jesus Christ is the Son of God resurrected from the dead and ascended to God's right hand exercising the authority of the Divine. And I... I killed Stephen, an innocent righteous man, I dragged fathers away from their wives and babies, I burned Christians with hot iron and beat them bloody until they denied this Savior. What have I done!
- C. How the Lord converted him - Saul is convinced; now he must be saved
  - 1. Acts 9:6 - Without exception, the Gospel is a teaching religion; one man must teach another. If Saul was to be saved, he must be told by another man and decide for himself
  - 2. Acts 9:17-18, 22:16

## **III. Acts 9:8-9, 18-22 - PROOF OF SAUL'S CONVERSION**

- A. Proven by his works - John 14:15
- B. Proven by his words - Gal. 1:22-24
- C. Proven by his walk - Gal. 2:20

### **Conclusion:**

- A. We will never find a greater testimony to the power of the gospel than in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus; there will never be a greater witness to the resurrection of Christ than that of the apostle Paul
- B. When every sinner is saved, he experiences the very same changes
  - 1. He is born again - John 3:3.
  - 2. He is a new creature - 2Cor. 5:17
  - 3. He receives a new heart - Ez. 36:26