

Acts 9:1-30, The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus
April 25, 1992
H. Van Dyke Parunak

Overview

Bible study principle: Sometimes it helps to understand a passage if we compare it with something else. Luke offers us two comparisons for the story of Saul's conversion.

1. Review the story of Saul's conversion.
2. Compare it with 2 Kings 6. For the fourth time in four chapters, we will see a close dependence on a story from the history of Elijah and Elisha.
3. Then compare Saul's reception in Damascus with that in Jerusalem.

A. Overview of Saul's Conversion

1. v.1. Must understand Saul's state of mind in doing this: Gal. 1:13,14; Phil. 3:6. Saul viewed the persecution of the church as a duty toward God. Not only did he not think it was wrong; he felt himself particularly holy to do it.
2. v.2, the Romans gave the Jews power of extradition. This action was fully legal under Roman law.
3. v.2, "this way," lit. "the way."
 - a) Title used to describe the new faith: 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22; cf. 16:17; 18:25-26.
 - b) Its meaning: "road," "path." Cf. John 14:6, Christ is the only road that leads to the Father.
 - c) Point: being a believer is a *process*, not a one-time *decision*. When we trust Christ, we enter on a road that we must travel actively every day of our lives. The question is not, "Did you ever receive the Lord Jesus?" but, "Are you trusting in Christ now?"
4. v.4, "persecutest thou me." Cf. Matt. 25:31-46. Whatever is done to us, the Lord feels. He who touches God's people touches the apple of God's eye, Zech. 2:8--Gene scratching my cornea.
5. v.6, "What wilt thou have me to do?"
 - a) Compare other similar questions:
 - 1) Acts 2:37, Jews on Pentecost: "Repent and be baptized."
 - 2) Acts 16:30,31, Philippian jailor: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."
 - b) The answer to Saul is much more ambiguous than those to the Jews and the jailor. "Go into the city and wait."
 - c) Hears nothing for three days (v.9).
 - d) For a zealous Jew, what could be worse? In the midst (as he thought) of serving God with all his might, he sees a divine vision telling him that he is in fact persecuting the Messiah. To the natural Jewish question, "All right, then, what should

I do?" he receives a most frustrating answer: "Wait, I'll tell you later." For one seeking to please God by means of good works, there could hardly be a greater shock.

6. v.9, "three days." What did Saul think about during this time? I believe this is the setting of Rom. 7:7-11. Up until now the law had been something under his control, a mechanism by which he could earn God's favor. But something has gone very wrong; in keeping the law as best he can, he has persecuted the Lord himself. So he begins thinking through the law, and for the first time feels himself condemned by it, powerless to answer it. "The commandment came" to him in a way that his Jewish training had hidden it from him before, and he realized himself to be sinful and dead before God.
7. vv. 13-15. Notice
 - a) the love and forgiveness that is required of Ananias toward Saul;
 - b) what the consequences would have been had he failed in this love!
8. v.15, Saul as a "chosen vessel." Note how Saul himself amplifies this image in
 - a) Rom. 9 (God's sovereignty in doing the choosing)
 - b) and 2 Tim. 2:20,21 (man's responsibility to separate from ungodly people and take a stand for Christ)

B. **2 Kings 6 and Acts 9**

First comparison: with a story in the Elijah-Elisha cycle, such as we have seen already in ch. 6-8.

1. Trace the parallels
 - a) Enemies of God's people: 2K 8-12, A 1, King of Syria and his soldiers // High Priest and Saul
 - b) Attempted extradition: 2K 13-15, A 2-3a.
 - c) Fearful disciple: 2K 15-16, A 10-14 (out of sequence)
 - d) Reassured by Lord: 2K 17, A 15-16.
 - e) Enemy blinded: 2K 18, A 3b-8a
 - f) Led into city: 2K 19, A 8b-9
 - g) Sight restored by intended victim: 2K 20, A 17-18
 - h) Fed by intended victim: 2K 21-23a, A 19a
 - i) Enemy returns to origin: 2K 23b, A 23-26a (out of sequence)
 - j) God's people secure: 2K 23c, A 19b-22
2. Recall previous parallels from Elijah/Elisha:
 - a) Acts 6-7//1 Kings 21, Stephen and Naboth (Stephen, in rebuking the Sanhedrin, is also like Elijah rebuking Ahab)
 - b) Acts 8a and 8b//2 Kings 5,
 - 1) Simon and Gehazi (Peter rebukes Simon as Elisha rebukes Gehazi)
 - 2) Eunuch and Naaman (Philip helps Eunuch as Elisha helps Naaman)
 - c) Now we have Ananias as Elisha

3. What is the point?
 - a) The religious system of the day is cast as Ahab (the most pagan king of Israel), or even as Syrians. Complete apostasy. High priest here is king of Syria in 2 Kings.
 - b) The heroes of the stories (Stephen, Peter, Philip, Ananias) are compared with Elijah and Elisha, highly independent spiritual leaders who stood against the tide. --> We must stand individually before the Lord; can't depend on the organization.
 - c) Vignettes of three kinds of converts:
 - 1) Friendly but insincere, like Simon
 - 2) Gentile, the Eunuch;
 - 3) Former enemy turned completely around, like Saul.

C. The Two Receptions of Saul

Second comparison: Saul's reception in Damascus and in Jerusalem.

Trace the parallels

1. Saul enters the city: 8-9, 26a.
2. Encounter with Christians: 10-12, 26b.
Application: Note the differences in how believers contact unbelievers and other believers. God sends us out to unbelievers; visiting believers should seek out their brothers and sisters in a new town.
3. Fear by believers: 13-14, 26c.
4. Reassurance: 15-16, 27.
Application: Note the three components of Barnabas' commendation of Saul, an example for how we should recognize other believers:
 - a) His spiritual experience
 - b) The Lord's charge, which he has accepted
 - c) His practical obedience
5. Reception and fellowship: 17-19, 28. Enters fully into the life of the assembly.
6. Bold preaching: 20-22, 29a. The gift of a newcomer is put to work.

These two remind us that our membership is in the body of Christ, not in a local assembly. Wherever we go, we are expected to exercise what God has given us for the good of the body.
7. Jewish opposition: 23-24, 29b.
8. Escape aided by believers, 25, 30.
We often see Saul on the run like this! He is no coward, but we'll see later that God commands him to leave Jerusalem to pursue a ministry elsewhere.

Summary

Many individual applications. Note the Bible study principle involved: God often gives us a variety of perspectives to take on a passage. Taking the time to do all of them will deepen our understanding.

Hymn:

Analysis

A. 1-25, Paul in Damascus

1. purpose p

- a) text: 1 (O de\ Sau^los, e)/ti e)mpne/wn a)peilh^s kai\ fo/nou ei)s tou\s maqhta\s tou^ kuri/ou, proselqw\n tw^| a)rxierei^ 2 h)|th/sato par' au)tou^ e)pistola\s ei)s Damasko\n pro\s ta\s sunagwa/s,
- b) purpose: conditional p: o(/pws
 - 1) e)a/n tinas eu(/rh| th^s o(dou^ o)/ntas, a)/ndras te kai\ gunai^kas,
 - 2) dedeme/nous a)ga/gh| ei)s)Ierousalh/m.

2. theophany

- a) 3 e)n de\ tw^| poreu/esqai e)ge/neto au)to\n e)ggi/zein th^| Damaskw^|,
- b) e)cai/fnhs te au)to\n perih/strayen fw^s e)k tou^ ou)ranou^,
- c) 4 kai\ pesw\n e)pi\ th\n gh^h)/kousen fwnh\n le/gousan au)tw^|, Saou\l Saou/l, ti/ me diw/keis;
- d) 5 ei)^pen de/, Ti/s ei)^, ku/rie;
- e) o(de/,
 - 1))Egw/ ei)mi)Ihsou^s
 - 2) o(\n su\ diw/keis:
 - 3) 6 a)lla\ a)na/sthqi
 - 4) kai\ ei)/selqe ei)s th\n po/lin,
 - 5) kai\ lalhqh/setai/ soi o(/ ti/ se dei^ poiei^n.
- f) 7 oi(de\ a)/ndres oi(sunodeu/ontes au)tw^| ei(sth/keisan e)neoi/, a)kou/ontes me\n th^s fwnh^s mhde/na de\ gewrou^ntes.
- g) 8 h)ge/rqh de\ Sau^los a)po\ th^s gh^s,
- h) a)new|gme/nwn de\ tw^n o)fqalmw^n au)tou^ ou)de\n e)/blepen: Judicial blindness in the OT: compare the story in 2 Kings 6:8-23.
 - 1) God's people are faced with an enemy (Jews vs. Christians; Syrians vs. Israelites)
 - 2) The enemy sends out an envoy to another city to arrest rebels (Saul to Damascus for believers; army to Dothan for Elisha)
 - 3) A fearful godly person (Ananias; Elisha's servant)
 - 4) The attacker is smitten blind (Saul; army)
 - 5) Blind person is led somewhere, then sight is restored.
 - 6) The attacker is dealt with graciously by his quarry, and eats and drinks with them.

3. xeiragwou^ntes de\ au)to\n ei)sh/gagon ei)s Damasko/n.

4. 9 kai\ h)^n h(me/ras trei^s mh\ ble/pwn,

5. kai\ ou)k e)/fagen ou)de\ e)/pien.

6. Call of Ananias

- a) 10)^Hn de/ tis maqhth\s e)n Damaskw^| o)no/mati (Anani/as,
- b) kai\ ei)^pen pro\s au)to\n e)n o(ra/mati o(ku/rios, (Anani/a.

- c) o(de\ ei)^pen,)Idou\ e)gw/, ku/rie.
- d) 11 o(de\ ku/rios pro\s au)to/n,
 1))Anasta\s poreu/qhti e)pi\ th\n r(u/mhn th\n kaloume/nhn Eu)gei^an
 2) kai\ zh/thson e)n oi)ki/a|)Iou/da Sau^lon o)no/mati Tarse/a:
 3) i)dou\ ga\r proseu/xetai,
 4) 12 kai\ ei)^den a)/ndra [e)n o(ra/mati] (Anani/an o)no/mati ei)selqo/nta kai\ e)piqe/nta au)tw^| [ta\s] xei^ras o(/pws a)nable/yh|.
- e) 13 a)pekri/qh de\ (Anani/as, Ku/rie, h)/kousa a)po\ pollw^
 peri\ tou^ a)ndro\s tou/tou, o(/sa kaka\ toi^s a(gi/ois sou e)poi/hsen e)n)Ierousalh/m:
 14 kai\ w(^de e)/xei e)cousi/an para\ tw^n a)rxiere/wn dh^sai pa/ntas tou\s e)pikaloume/nous to\ o)/noma/ sou.
- f) 15 ei)^pen de\ pro\s au)to\n o(ku/rios, Poreu/ou,
 1) <Why should you go?> o(/ti skeu^os e)klogh^s e)sti/n moi ou(^tos tou^ basta/sai to\ o)/noma/ mou e)nw/pion e)qmw^
 te kai\ basile/wn ui(w^n te)Israh/l:
 a> Rom. 9:21-24, God's sovereignty over the vessels
 b> 2 Tim. 2:20,21, "if a man purge himself from these..."
 c> <Why do I call him a chosen vessel?> 16 e)gw\ ga\r u(podei/cw au)tw^| o(/sa dei^ au)to\n u(pe\r tou^ o)no/mato/s mou pagei^n.
7. Ananaias visits Saul
 a) 17)Aph^lqen de\ (Anani/as
 b) kai\ ei)sh^lqen ei)s th\n oi)ki/an,
 c) kai\ e)piqei\s e)p' au)to\n ta\s xei^ras ei)^pen, Saou\l a)delfe/, o(ku/rios a)pe/stalke/n me,)Ihsou^s o(o)fqei/s soi e)n th^| o(dw^| h(^| h)/rxou, o(/pws a)nable/yh|s kai\ plhsqh^|s pneu/matos a(gi/ou.
 d) 18 kai\ eu)qe/ws a)pe/pesan au)tou^ a)po\ tw^n o)fqalmw^
 n w(s lepi/des,
 e) a)ne/bleye/n te,
 f) kai\ a)nasta\s e)bapti/sqh,
 g) 19 kai\ labw\n trofh\n e)ni/sxusen.
8. Saul in Damascus
 a))Ege/neto de\ meta\ tw^n e)n Damaskw^| maqhtw^
 n h(me/ras tina/s,
 b) 20 kai\ eu)qe/ws e)n tai^s sunagwai^s e)kh/russen to\n)Ihsou^
 n o(/ti ou(^to/s e)stin o(ui(o\s tou^ qeou^.
 c) 21 e)ci/stanto de\ pa/ntes oi(a)kou/ontes kai\ e)/legon, Ou)x ou(^to/s e)stin o(porqh/sas ei)s)Ierousalh/m tou\s e)pikaloume/nous to\ o)/noma tou^to, kai\ w(^de ei)s tou^to e)lhlu/qei i(/na dedeme/nous au)tou\s a)ga/gh| e)pi\ tou\s a)rxierei^s;
 d) 22 Sau^los de\ ma^llon e)nedunamou^to kai\ sune/xunnen [tou\s])Ioudai/ous tou\s katoikou^ntas e)n Damaskw^|, sumbiba/zwn o(/ti ou(^to/s e)stin o(Xristo/s.
 e) 23 (Ws de\ e)plhrou^nto h(me/rai i(kanai/, sunebouleu/santo oi()Ioudai^oi a)nelei^
 n au)to/n:
 f) 24 e)gnw/sqh de\ tw^| Sau/lw| h(e)pi boulh\ au)tw^n.
 g) parethrou^nto de\ kai\ ta\s pu/las h(me/ras te kai\ nukto\s

o(/pws au)to\n a)ne/lwsin:
h) 25 labo/ntes de\ au)ton oi(maqhtai\ nukto\s dia\ tou^
tei/xous kaqh^kan au)to\n xala/santes e)n spuri/di.

B. 26-30, Paul in Jerusalem

1. 26 Parageno/menos de\ ei)s)Ierousalh\m e)pei/razen kolla^sqai
toi^s maqhtai^s:
2. kai\ pa/ntes e)fobou^nto au)to/n, mh\ pisteu/ontes o(/ti e)sti\n
maqht/s.
3. 27 Barnaba^s de\ e)pilabo/menos au)to\n h)/gagen pro\s tou\s
a)posto/lous,
4. kai\ dihgh/sato au)toi^s
a) pw^s e)n th^| o(dw^| ei)^den to\n ku/rion
b) kai\ o(/ti e)la/lhsen au)tw^|,
c) kai\ pw^s e)n Damaskw^| e)parrhsia/sato e)n tw^| o)no/mati
tou^)Ihsou^.
5. 28 kai\ h)^n met' au)tw^ n ei)sporeuo/menos kai\ e)kporeuo/menos
ei)s)Ierousalh/m, parrhsiazoz/menos e)n tw^| o)no/mati tou^
kuri/ou,
6. 29 e)la/lei te kai\ sunezh/tei pro\s tou\s (Ellhnista/s:
7. oi(de\ e)pexei/roun a)nelei^ n au)to/n.
8. 30 e)pigno/ntes de\ oi(a)delfoi\ kath/gagon au)to\n ei)s
Kaisa/reian
9. kai\ e)cape/steilan au)to\n ei)s Tarso/n.