

GOD'S CALLING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Lesson Fifteen

IN ACTS: Saul of Tarsus

Burden to Impart:

The Lord calls and raises up whoever He wills, according to His own sovereignty and mercy. Hence, Saul of Tarsus, the chief opponent of the gospel, was called, saved, and became a zealous lover and follower of the Lord.

Memory Verse: "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace..." (2 Timothy 1:9).

Facts to Teach:

1. As the Lord's faithful witness, Stephen, was being stoned to death, a young man named Saul was standing nearby. He was approving of Stephen's death and helped by watching the garments of those who dragged him outside the city to stone him. Saul joined the great persecution that had begun against the Christians at Jerusalem. He believed they were lying about Jesus in saying that He was raised from the dead. In his ignorance he hated the Christians and gave all of his strength and zeal to eliminate them. He devastated the church, entered house after house, dragged off both men and women who called upon the Lord, and delivered them to prison (Acts 7:58--8:3).
2. Saul was not an evil "gangster." He was a sincere Jew who wanted to defend his fathers' religion. Because of his ignorance and unbelief he hated the name of Jesus and wanted to destroy all who preached or called upon His name (1 Tim. 1:13). Saul began to take the lead in the persecution, even obtaining authority to go to foreign cities to arrest and bring the Christians back to Jerusalem in chains (Acts 9:1-2; 26:11). This insulting, destructive person was being used by Satan to destroy the church and persecute the followers of Jesus.
3. Though Satan was using Saul, God had chosen him before the foundation of the earth to be a special vessel to bear the Lord's testimony before Jews, Gentiles, and even kings (Acts 9:15-16). This one who had caused God's people to suffer so much was destined to suffer together with them faithfully for the rest of his life.
4. While on his way to persecute the Christians in Damascus, Saul was surprised by a visit from the Lord Jesus, the very One he did not believe existed. A heavenly light, beyond the brightness of the noontime sun, shone around Saul and those with him, causing them all to fall to the ground (Acts 26:9-16). A voice which only Saul understood said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul asked two questions to this great heavenly voice. The first was, "Who are You, Lord?" When this heavenly One answered, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting," Saul realized that he was a great sinner. He was persecuting the Lord and the Lord's people. His next question was, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). Realizing that everything he had done against Jesus was wrong, Saul now wanted to know what he should do.
5. He was to go to Damascus and wait for the Lord to give Him further instructions. But when Saul arose from the ground, He was blind. The glory of the Lord's light blinded Saul. The powerful persecutor had been broken down by Jesus. As a vanquished foe he was led blindly and humbly to Damascus (Acts 22:11). He spent the next three days neither eating or drinking. He was praying. Then the Lord appeared to a disciple in a vision and sent him to Saul to pray for him. After that Saul's sight was restored, he was baptized, and he immediately proclaimed in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. Thus, the chief persecutor of those who called on the name of Jesus became one of His callers and followers (Acts 22:16).