

A PHARISEE CHANGES HIS MIND



I HAVE already told you about the scribes and Pharisees. They were the religious rulers of the Israelites, many of whom were jealous of Jesus and Stephen, and caused them to be put to death. They were also the ones who put Peter and John in prison, and who said that they would have to stop telling the people about Jesus. Of course Peter and John continued to tell the people about Jesus because that was what God wanted them to do.

Now I don't want you to think that all the scribes and Pharisees were jealous and wicked men. Oh no! Some of them were good, sincere men. These good Pharisees persecuted God's people because they did not know any better. They thought Jesus and his disciples were doing what God did not want them to do, but these good Pharisees were wrong. We should always make sure that what we do is right, because we may think we are doing right when we are really doing wrong.

That is the way it was with one of the Pharisees by the name of Saul. Saul's home was in a city named Tarsus, so he was called "Saul of Tarsus." Saul was one of the Pharisees who decided that Deacon Stephen should be stoned to death. Saul didn't actually throw any stones at Stephen, but he held the coats of those who did throw the stones. But he didn't do this because he was jealous of Stephen. Saul thought Stephen was one of God's enemies, and therefore should be put to death, but he was wrong.

Many others besides Stephen were made to suffer by Saul, not only in Jerusalem but in other cities as well. While in Jerusalem, Saul visited the high priest of Israel who gave him letters of authority to arrest the disciples of Jesus wherever he could find them, and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished. So Saul started out to find as many of the disciples as he could. He was on his way to a city named Damascus, when suddenly he was surrounded by a very bright light. The light was even brighter than sunshine. The Bible tells us that it was a light from heaven.

When Saul saw this bright light shining all around him he fell down upon the ground. He was probably very much frightened. Then he heard a voice speaking to him, saying:

"Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?"

Saul just couldn't imagine who was speaking to him, so he answered the voice, saying:

"Who art thou, Lord?"

Saul knew that the voice he heard was not the voice of a man. The word "Lord" means "mighty one," and probably Saul thought he had heard the voice of one of God's mighty angels.

But the voice Saul heard was the voice of One much more important than an angel. Whose voice do you suppose it was? We will let the Bible answer that question. When Saul asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" the voice replied:

"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

Wasn't that wonderful! Jesus was speaking to Saul from heaven.

Saul was certainly surprised! He had been arresting the disciples of Jesus and putting them in prison, and he had consented to the

stoning of Stephen for preaching about Jesus. But now Jesus was speaking to Saul, and he knew from this that he had been doing wrong in causing the friends of Jesus to suffer.

When Jesus was made alive after he had been crucified, the scribes and Pharisees told the false story that someone had stolen his body from the tomb, and that he had not been made alive at all. Saul must have believed this story, but now he knew that he had believed a lie about Jesus. He knew now that Jesus had been made alive again, for he had heard his voice speaking to him from heaven. Saul was a good man, but he had been deceived. Now Saul had found out he had been deceived, and he wanted to work just as hard for Jesus as he had been working against him. So Saul replied to his Master:

“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

Jesus answered, saying:

“Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”

Saul arose from the ground, and discovered that he was blind! The bright light from heaven was more than his eyes could stand, and it had blinded him. There were others traveling with Saul, and when they realized that he had suddenly become blind they led him into the city of Damascus.

He was taken to the home of a man named Judas. This was not, of course, the Judas who betrayed Jesus. There were many people then who had the same name as others, just as they do now. He remained in the home of Judas for three days, and during all that time he didn't eat or drink a thing.

At the same time God spoke to one of Jesus' disciples who lived in Damascus. He asked him to visit Saul and explain what God wanted him to do. God told his disciple that Saul had seen a vision and that he now believed in Jesus and wanted to serve him. This disciple was named Ananias. Ananias had heard about Saul, and knew that he had been causing the disciples of Jesus to suffer, so he was a little afraid to visit him.

But the Lord assured Ananias that Saul was a sincere believer and would be glad to see him. So Ananias went to the home of Judas, and when he saw the Pharisee Saul, who had changed his mind and now believed that Jesus was the great One whom God had promised to send to bless the people, he spoke to him, saying: “Brother Saul.”

Ananias then explained to Saul what he was to do in the service of God.

Yes, Saul certainly changed his mind about Jesus. He had been on his way to Damascus to arrest the disciples of Jesus, but now that he was in the city and had learned the truth, he went to work preaching to the Jews about Jesus, telling them that he was the Son of God, and the great One whom God had promised to send. You see, when Ananias visited Saul and told him what he was to do for God, Saul’s eyesight was restored. And now, wherever Saul went he told the people about Jesus.

QUESTIONS

- Who was Saul, and why is he called “Saul of Tarsus”?
- Why was Saul going to Damascus, and what occurred before he arrived?
- What work did God have for Saul to do?