



Ellen Gould White

*Sketches from
the Life
of Paul*

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Saul the Persecutor

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From among the most bitter and relentless persecutors of the church of Christ, arose the ablest defender and most successful herald of the gospel. With the apostolic brotherhood of the chosen twelve, who had companied with Christ from his baptism even to his ascension, was numbered one who had never seen the Lord while he dwelt among men, and who had heard his name uttered only in unbelief and contempt. But beneath the blindness and bigotry of the zealot and the Pharisee, Infinite Wisdom discerned a heart loyal to truth and duty. And the voice from Heaven made itself heard above the clamours of pride and prejudice. In the promulgation of the gospel, Divine Providence would unite with the zeal and devotion of the Galilean peasants, the fiery vigour and intellectual power of a rabbi of Jerusalem. To lead the battle against pagan philosophy and Jewish formalism, was chosen one who had himself witnessed the debasing power of heathen worship, and endured the spiritual bondage of Pharisaic exaction.

Saul of Tarsus was a Jew, not only by descent, but by the stronger ties of lifelong training, patriotic devotion, and religious faith. Though a Roman citizen, born in a Gentile city, he was educated in Jerusalem by the most eminent of the rabbis, and diligently instructed in all the laws and traditions of the Fathers. Thus he shared, to the fullest extent, the hopes and aspirations, the lofty pride and unyielding prejudice, of his nation. He declares himself to have been "a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a

Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." He was regarded by the Jewish leaders as a young man of great promise, and high hopes were cherished concerning him as an able and zealous defender of the ancient faith.

In common with his nation, Saul had cherished the hope of a Messiah who should reign as a temporal prince, to break from the neck of Israel the Roman yoke, and exalt her to the throne of universal empire. He had no personal knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth or of his mission, but he readily imbibed the scorn and hatred of the rabbis toward one who was so far from fulfilling their ambitious hopes; and after the death of Christ, he eagerly joined with priests and rulers in the persecution of his followers as a proscribed and hated sect.

The Jewish leaders had supposed that the work of Christ would end with him; that when his voice was no longer heard, the excitement would die out, and the people would return to the doctrines and traditions of men. But instead of this, they witnessed the marvellous scenes of the day of Pentecost. The disciples, endowed with a power and energy hitherto unknown, preached Christ to the vast multitude that from all parts of the world assembled at the feast. Signs and wonders confirmed their words; and in the very stronghold of Judaism, thousands openly declared their faith in Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified malefactor, as the promised Messiah.

And but a short time after the events of Pentecost, a mighty miracle, wrought by the apostles, filled all Jerusalem with excitement. A cripple who had been lame from his birth

was healed by Peter and John in the presence of the people, within the very precincts of the temple. This astonishing cure was performed in the name of Jesus, the apostles declaring that he had ascended to the heavens, and thence imparted power to his followers; and they fearlessly charged upon the Jews the crime of his rejection and murder. Great numbers of the people received the doctrines preached by the apostles. Many of the most determined opponents could but believe, though they refused to acknowledge, that Jesus had risen from the dead. They did not, however, repent of their terrible crime in putting him to death. When the power from Heaven came upon the apostles in so remarkable a manner, fear held the priests and elders from violence; but their bitterness and malice were unchanged. Five thousand had already openly declared their faith in Christ; and both Pharisees and Sadducees decided among themselves that if those new teachers were suffered to go on unchecked, their own influence would be in greater danger than when Jesus was upon earth. If one or two discourses from the apostles could produce results so marvellous, the world would soon believe on Christ, and the influence of priests and rulers would be lost. They therefore seized upon the apostles, and thrust them into prison, expecting to intimidate and silence them. But the disciple who in cowardice had once denied his Lord, now boldly declared the power of a risen Saviour. In vain the rulers commanded to speak no more in that name. Their threats were powerless, and at last, being restrained from violence by fear of the people, they set the apostles at liberty.

Subsequent events served but to augment their fears and their hatred. The power with which the apostles still proclaimed the gospel, the wonders wrought by them in the name of Jesus, the converts daily added to the church, the union and harmony that pervaded the body of believers, the swift and terrible manifestation of divine judgment in the case of Ananias and Sapphira,--all were marked by the Jewish leaders, and urged them on to still more determined efforts to crush the powerful heresy. Again the apostles were arrested and imprisoned, and the Sanhedrim was called to try their case. A large number of learned men in addition to the council was summoned, and they conferred together as to what should be done with these disturbers of the peace. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought forth his servants, bidding them again proclaim in the temple the words of life. Great was the amazement of priests and rulers when, being assembled at dawn to pass sentence upon the prisoners, they received the report that the prison doors were securely bolted and the guard stationed before them, but that the apostles themselves had been mysteriously delivered, and were already preaching in the temple.

Once more summoning them before the council, the high priest angrily reminded them of the warning they had received, and charged them with endeavouring to bring upon the Jews the blood of Christ. They were not as willing to bear the blame of slaying Jesus as when they swelled the cry with the debased mob, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

Peter and his brethren repeated their former assertion, that they must obey God rather than men. And then the accused became the accusers, and as they were moved by the Spirit of God, they solemnly charged the murder of Christ upon the priests and rulers who composed the council. These dignitaries were now so enraged that they decided without further trial, to take the law into their own hands, and put the prisoners to death. They would have executed their murderous designs at once but for the calm and judicious counsel of Gamaliel, who warned them to beware of proceeding to violent measures before the character of the movement they opposed should be fully developed, lest haply they should be found fighting against God. The learning and high position of this eminent rabbi gave weight to his words. The priests could not deny the reasonableness of his views. They very reluctantly released their prisoners, after beating them with rods, and charging them again and again to preach no more in the name of Jesus or their lives would pay the penalty of their boldness.

But punishments and threats were alike unheeded. The apostles "departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." Despite all opposition, "the number of the disciples was multiplied."

And now occurred a series of events, which, though seeming to bring only defeat and loss to the cause of Christ, were to result in its triumph, giving to the world one of the noblest examples of Christian faith, and winning from the ranks of its opposers their most active and successful

champion. Most of the early believers were cut off from family and friends by the zealous bigotry of the Jews. Many of the converts had been thrown out of business and exiled from their homes, because they had espoused the cause of Christ. It was necessary to provide this large number, congregated at Jerusalem, with homes and sustenance. Those having money and possessions cheerfully sacrificed them to meet the existing emergency. Their means were laid at the feet of the apostles, who made distribution to every man according as he had need.

Among the believers were not only those who were Jews by birth and spoke the Hebrew tongue, but also residents of other countries, who used the Greek language. Between these two classes there had long existed distrust, and even antagonism; and though their hearts were now softened and united by Christian love, yet the old jealousies were easily rekindled. Thus it came to pass that as disciples were multiplied, "there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews." The cause of complaint was an alleged neglect of the Greek widows in the distribution of the fund set apart for the poor. Such inequality would have been contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and prompt measures were taken to remove all occasion for dissatisfaction. Summoning a meeting of the believers, the apostles stated that the time had come when they should be relieved from the task of apportioning to the poor, and from similar burdens, so that they could be left free to preach Christ. "Wherefore, brethren," said they, "look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this

business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." This advice was followed, and the seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties by prayer and the laying on of hands.

The appointment of the seven was greatly blessed of God. The church advanced in numbers and strength, "and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." This success was due both to the greater freedom secured to the apostles, and to the zeal and power manifested by the seven deacons. The fact that these brethren had been ordained for a special work, did not exclude them from teaching the faith. On the contrary, they were fully qualified to instruct in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success.

The foremost of the seven was Stephen, who, "full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Though a Jew by birth, he spoke the Greek language, and was familiar with the customs and manners of the Greeks. He therefore found opportunity to proclaim the gospel in the synagogues of the Greek Jews. Learned rabbis and doctors of the law engaged in public discussion with him, confidently expecting an easy victory. But "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." Not only did he speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, but it was plain that he was a student of the prophecies, and learned in all matters of the law. He ably defended the truths which he advocated, and utterly defeated his opponents.

The priests and rulers who witnessed the wonderful manifestation of the power that attended the ministration of

Stephen, were filled with bitter hatred. Instead of yielding to the weight of evidence he presented, they determined to silence his voice by putting him to death. They had on several occasions bribed the Roman authorities to pass over without comment instances where the Jews had taken the law into their own hands, and tried, condemned, and executed prisoners according to their national custom. The enemies of Stephen did not doubt that they could pursue such a course without danger to themselves. They determined to risk the consequences at all events, and they therefore seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrim council for trial.

Learned Jews from the surrounding countries were summoned for the purpose of refuting the arguments of the accused. Saul was also present, and took a leading part against Stephen. He brought the weight of eloquence and the logic of the rabbis to bear upon the case, to convince the people that Stephen was preaching delusive and dangerous doctrines. But he met in Stephen one as highly educated as himself, and one who had a full understanding of the purpose of God in the spreading of the gospel to other nations.

The priests and rulers prevailed nothing against the clear, calm wisdom of Stephen, though they were vehement in their opposition. They determined to make an example of him, and, while they thus satisfied their revengeful hatred, prevent others, through fear, from adopting his belief. False witnesses were hired to testify that they had heard him speak blasphemous words against the temple and the law. Said they, "For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of

Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."

As Stephen stood face to face with his judges, to answer to the crime of blasphemy, a holy radiance shone upon his countenance. "And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." Those who exalted Moses might have seen in the face of the prisoner the same holy light which radiated the face of that ancient prophet. Many who beheld the lighted countenance of Stephen trembled and veiled their faces; but stubborn unbelief and prejudice never faltered.

Stephen was questioned as to the truth of the charges against him, and took up his defence in a clear, thrilling voice that rang through the council hall. He proceeded to rehearse the history of the chosen people of God, in words that held the assembly spell-bound. He showed a thorough knowledge of the Jewish economy, and the spiritual interpretation of it now made manifest through Christ. He made plain his own loyalty to God and to the Jewish faith, while he showed that the law in which they trusted for salvation had not been able to preserve Israel from idolatry. He connected Jesus Christ with all the Jewish history. He referred to the building of the temple by Solomon, and to the words of both Solomon and Isaiah: "Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. What house will ye build me? saith the Lord; or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?" The place of God's highest worship was in Heaven.

When Stephen had reached this point, there was a tumult among the people. The prisoner read his fate in the countenances before him. He perceived the resistance that met his words, which were spoken at the dictation of the Holy Ghost. He knew that he was giving his last testimony. When he connected Jesus Christ with the prophecies, and spoke of the temple as he did, the priest, affecting to be horror-stricken, rent his robe. This act was to Stephen a signal that his voice would soon be silenced forever. Although he was just in the midst of his sermon, he abruptly concluded it by suddenly breaking away from the chain of history, and, turning upon his infuriated judges, said, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers; who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

At this the priests and rulers were beside themselves with anger. They were more like wild beasts of prey than like human beings. They rushed upon Stephen, gnashing their teeth. But he was not intimidated; he had expected this. His face was calm, and shone with an angelic light. The infuriated priests and the excited mob had no terrors for him. The scene about him faded from his vision; the gates of Heaven were ajar, and Stephen, looking in, saw the glory of the courts of God, and Christ, as if just risen from his throne, standing ready to sustain his servant, who was about to suffer martyrdom for his name. When Stephen proclaimed

the glorious scene opened before him, it was more than his persecutors could endure. They stopped their ears, that they might not hear his words, and uttering loud cries ran furiously upon him with one accord. "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." The witnesses who had accused him were required to cast the first stones. These persons laid down their clothes at the feet of Saul, who had taken an active part in the disputation, and had consented to the prisoner's death.

The martyrdom of Stephen made a deep impression upon all who witnessed it. It was a sore trial to the church, but resulted in the conversion of Saul. The faith, constancy, and glorification of the martyr could not be effaced from his memory. The signet of God upon his face, his words, that reached to the very soul of those who heard them, remained in the memory of the beholders, and testified to the truth of that which he had proclaimed.

There had been no legal sentence passed upon Stephen; but the Roman authorities were bribed by large sums of money to make no investigation of the case. Saul seemed to be imbued with a frenzied zeal at the scene of Stephen's trial and death. He seemed to be angered at his own secret convictions that Stephen was honoured of God at the very period when he was dishonoured of men. He continued to persecute the church of God, hunting them down, seizing them in their houses, and delivering them up to the priests and rulers for imprisonment and death. His zeal in carrying

forward the persecution was a terror to the Christians in Jerusalem. The Roman authorities made no special effort to stay the cruel work, and secretly aided the Jews in order to conciliate them, and to secure their favour.

Saul was greatly esteemed by the Jews for his zeal in persecuting the believers. After the death of Stephen, he was elected a member of the Sanhedrim council, in consideration of the part he had acted on that occasion. This learned and zealous rabbi was a mighty instrument in the hand of Satan to carry out his rebellion against the Son of God; but he was soon to be employed to build up the church he was now tearing down. A Mightier than Satan had selected Saul to take the place of the martyred Stephen, to preach and suffer for his name, and to spread far and wide the glad tidings of salvation through his blood.

Conversion of Saul

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The mind of Saul was greatly stirred by the triumphant death of Stephen. He was shaken in his prejudice; but the opinions and arguments of the priests and rulers finally convinced him that Stephen was a blasphemer; that Jesus Christ whom he preached was an impostor, and that those ministering in holy offices must be right. Being a man of decided mind and strong purpose, he became very bitter in his opposition to Christianity, after having once entirely settled in his mind that the views of the priests and scribes were right. His zeal led him to voluntarily engage in persecuting the believers. He caused holy men to be dragged before the councils, and to be imprisoned or condemned to death without evidence of any offense, save their faith in Jesus. Of a similar character, though in a different direction, was the zeal of James and John, when they would have called down fire from heaven to consume those who slighted and scorned their Master. {LP 21.1}

Saul was about to journey to Damascus upon his own business; but he was determined to accomplish a double purpose, by searching out, as he went, all the believers in Christ. For this purpose he obtained letters from the high priest to read in the synagogues, which authorized him to seize all those who were suspected of being believers in Jesus, and to send them by messengers to Jerusalem, there to be tried and punished. He set out upon his way, full of the strength and vigour of manhood and the fire of a mistaken zeal. {LP 21.2}

As the weary travellers neared Damascus, the eyes of Saul rested with pleasure upon the fertile land, the beautiful gardens, the fruitful orchards, and the cool streams that ran murmuring amid the fresh green shrubbery. It was very refreshing to look upon such a scene after a long, wearisome journey over a desolate waste. While Saul, with his companions, was gazing and admiring, suddenly a light above the brightness of the sun shone round about him, "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." {LP 22.1}

The scene was one of the greatest confusion. The companions of Saul were stricken with terror, and almost blinded by the intensity of the light. They heard the voice, but saw no one, and to them all was unintelligible and mysterious. But Saul, lying prostrate upon the ground, understood the words that were spoken, and saw clearly before him the Son of God. One look upon that glorious Being, imprinted his image forever upon the soul of the stricken Jew. The words struck home to his heart with appalling force. A flood of light poured in upon the darkened chambers of his mind, revealing his ignorance and error. He saw that while imagining himself to be zealously serving God in persecuting the followers of Christ, he had in reality been doing the work of Satan. {LP 22.2}

He saw his folly in resting his faith upon the assurances of the priests and rulers, whose sacred office had given them great influence over his mind, and caused him to

believe that the story of the resurrection was an artful fabrication of the disciples of Jesus. Now that Christ was revealed to Saul, the sermon of Stephen was brought forcibly to his mind. Those words which the priests had pronounced blasphemy, now appeared to him as truth. In that time of wonderful illumination, his mind acted with remarkable rapidity. He traced down through prophetic history, and saw that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension had been foretold by the prophets, and proved him to be the promised Messiah. He remembered the words of Stephen: "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God," and he knew that the dying saint had looked upon the kingdom of glory. {LP 22.3}

What a revelation was all this to the persecutor of the believers! Light, clear but terrible, had broken in upon his soul. Christ was revealed to him as having come to earth in fulfilment of his mission, being rejected, abused, condemned, and crucified by those whom he came to save, and as having risen from the dead, and ascended into the heavens. In that terrible moment he remembered that the holy Stephen had been sacrificed by his consent; and that through his instrumentality many worthy saints had met their death by cruel persecution. {LP 23.1}

"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." No doubt entered the mind of Saul that this was Jesus of Nazareth who spoke to him, and that he was indeed the long-looked-for Messiah, the Consolation and Redeemer of

Israel. And now this Jesus, who had, while teaching upon earth, spoken in parables to his hearers, using familiar objects to illustrate his meaning, likened the work of Saul, in persecuting the followers of Christ, to kicking against the pricks. Those forcible words illustrated the fact that it would be impossible for any man to stay the onward progress of the truth of Christ. It would march on to triumph and victory, while every effort to stay it would result in injury to the opposer. The persecutor, in the end, would suffer a thousand-fold more than those whom he had persecuted. Sooner or later his own heart would condemn him; he would find that he had, indeed, been kicking against the pricks. {LP 23.2}

The Saviour had spoken to Saul through Stephen, whose clear reasoning from the Scriptures could not be controverted. The learned Jew had seen the face of the martyr reflecting the light of Christ's glory, and looking like the face of an angel. He had witnessed his forbearance toward his enemies, and his forgiveness of them. He had further witnessed the fortitude and cheerful resignation of other believers in Jesus while tormented and afflicted, some of whom had yielded up their lives with rejoicing for their faith's sake. {LP 24.1}

All this testimony had appealed loudly to Saul, and thrust conviction upon his mind; but his education and prejudices, his respect for priests and rulers, and his pride of popularity, braced him to rebel against the voice of conscience and the grace of God. He had struggled entire nights against conviction, and had always ended the matter by avowing his belief that Jesus was not the Messiah, that he was an

impostor, and that his followers were deluded fanatics. {LP 24.2}

Now Christ had spoken to Saul with his own voice: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And the question, "Who art thou, Lord?" was answered by the same voice, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." Here Christ identifies himself with his suffering people. Saul, in persecuting the followers of Jesus, had struck directly against the Lord of Heaven. Jesus declares that in afflicting his brethren upon earth, Saul had struck against their Head and Representative in Heaven. In falsely accusing and testifying against them, he had falsely accused and testified against the Saviour of the world. Here it is plainly seen that Christ suffers in the person of his saints. {LP 25.1}

When the effulgent glory was withdrawn, and Saul arose from the earth, he found himself totally deprived of sight. The brightness of Christ's glory had been too intense for his mortal sight, and when it was removed, the blackness of night settled upon his vision. He believed that his blindness was the punishment of God for his cruel persecution of the followers of Jesus. He groped about in terrible darkness, and his companions, in fear and amazement, led him by the hand into Damascus. {LP 25.2}

How different from what he had anticipated was his entrance into that city! In proud satisfaction he had neared Damascus, expecting on his arrival to be greeted with ostentation and applause because of the honour conferred upon him by the high priest, and the great zeal and penetration he had manifested in searching out the believers, to carry them as captives to Jerusalem, there to

be condemned, and punished without mercy. He had determined that his journey should be crowned with success; and his courageous and persevering spirit quailed at no difficulties or dangers in the pursuance of his object. He had determined that no Christian should escape his vigilance; he would inquire of men, women, and children concerning their faith, and that of those with whom they were connected; he would enter houses, with power to seize their inmates, and to send them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

{LP 25.3}

But how changed was the scene from that which he had anticipated! Instead of wielding power and receiving honour, he was himself virtually a prisoner, being deprived of sight, and dependent upon the guidance of his companions. Helpless, and tortured by remorse, he felt himself to be under sentence of death, and knew not what further disposition the Lord would make of him. {LP 26.1}

He was taken to the house of the disciple Judas, and there he remained, in solitude, studying upon the strange revelation that had broken up all his plans, and changed the entire current of his life. He passed three days in perfect blindness, occupying that terrible time with reflection, repentance, and earnest prayer, neither eating nor drinking during that entire period. With bitterness he remembered Stephen, and the evidence he had given of being sustained by a power higher than that of earth. He thought with horror of his own guilt in allowing himself to be controlled by the malice and prejudice of the priests and rulers, closing his eyes and ears against the most striking evidence, and

relentlessly urging on the persecution of the believers in Christ. {LP 26.2}

He was in lonely seclusion; he had no communication with the church; for they had been warned of the purpose of his journey to Damascus by the believers in Jerusalem; and they believed that he was acting a part the better to carry out his design of persecuting them. He had no desire to appeal to the unconverted Jews; for he knew they would not listen to or heed his statements. He seemed to be utterly shut out from human sympathy; and he reflected, and prayed with a thoroughly broken and repentant spirit. {LP 27.1}

Those three days were like three years to the blind and conscience-smitten Jew. He was no novice in the Scriptures, and in his darkness and solitude he recalled the passages which referred to the Messiah, and traced down the prophecies, with a memory sharpened by the conviction that had taken possession of his mind. He became astonished at his former blindness of understanding, and at the blindness of the Jews in general, in rejecting Jesus as the promised Messiah. All now seemed plain to him, and he knew that it was prejudice and unbelief which had clouded his perceptions, and prevented him from discerning in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah of prophecy. {LP 27.2}

This wonderful conversion of Saul demonstrates in a startling manner the miraculous power of Christ in convicting the mind and heart of man. Saul had verily believed that to have faith in Jesus was virtually to repudiate the law of God and the service of sacrificial offerings. He had believed that Jesus had himself disregarded the law,

and had taught his disciples that it was now of no effect. He believed it to be his duty to strive with his utmost power to exterminate the alarming doctrine that Jesus was the Prince of life; and with conscientious zeal he had become a persevering persecutor of the church of Christ. {LP 27.3}

But Jesus, whose name of all others he most hated and despised, had revealed himself to Saul, for the purpose of arresting him in his mad career, and of making, from this most unpromising subject, an instrument by which to bear the gospel to the Gentiles. Saul was overwhelmed by this revelation, and perceived that in opposing Jesus of Nazareth, he had arrayed himself against the Redeemer of the world. Overcome by a sense of his guilt, he cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Jesus did not then and there inform him of the work he had assigned him, but sent him for instruction to the very disciples whom he had so bitterly persecuted. {LP 28.1}

The marvellous light that illuminated the darkness of Saul was the work of the Lord; but there was also a work that was to be done for him by the disciples of Christ. The answer to Saul's question is, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Jesus sends the inquiring Jew to his church, to obtain from them a knowledge of his duty. Christ performed the work of revelation and conviction; and now the penitent was in a condition to learn of those whom God had ordained to teach his truth. Thus Jesus gave sanction to the authority of his organized church, and placed Saul in connection with his representatives on earth. The light of heavenly illumination deprived Saul of sight; but Jesus, the great Healer, did not at

once restore it. All blessings flow from Christ, but he had now established a church as his representative on earth, and to it belonged the work of directing the repentant sinner in the way of life. The very men whom Saul had purposed to destroy were to be his instructors in the religion he had despised and persecuted. {LP 28.2}

The faith of Saul was severely tested during the three days of fasting and prayer at the house of Judas, in Damascus. He was totally blind, and in utter darkness of mind as to what was required of him. He had been directed to go to Damascus, where it would be told him what he was to do. In his uncertainty and distress he cried earnestly to God. "And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, 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." {LP 29.1}

Ananias could hardly credit the words of the angel messenger, for Saul's bitter persecution of the saints at Jerusalem had spread far and near. He presumed to expostulate; said he, "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." But the command to Ananias was imperative: "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." {LP 29.2}

The disciple, obedient to the direction of the angel, sought out the man who had but recently breathed out threatenings against all who believed in the name of Jesus. He addressed him: "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost; and immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized." {LP 30.1}

Christ here gives an example of his manner of working for the salvation of men. He might have done all this work directly for Saul; but this was not in accordance with his plan. His blessings were to come through the agencies which he had ordained. Saul had something to do in confession to those whose destruction he had meditated; and God had a responsible work for the men to do whom he had authorized to act in his stead. {LP 30.2}

Saul becomes a learner of the disciples. In the light of the law he sees himself a sinner. He sees that Jesus, whom in his ignorance he had considered an impostor, is the author and foundation of the religion of God's people from the days of Adam, and the finisher of the faith now so clear to his enlightened vision; the vindicator of the truth and the fulfiller of the prophecies. He had regarded Jesus as making of no effect the law of God; but when his spiritual vision was touched by the finger of God, he learned that Christ was the originator of the entire Jewish system of sacrifices; that he came into the world for the express purpose of vindicating his Father's law; and that in his death the typical law had met its antitype. By the light of the moral law, which he had

believed himself to be zealously keeping, Saul saw himself a sinner of sinners. He repented, that is, died to sin, became obedient to the law of God, exercised faith in Jesus Christ as his Saviour, was baptized, and preached Jesus as earnestly and zealously as he had once denounced him. {LP 30.3}

The Redeemer of the world does not sanction experience and exercise in religious matters independent of his organized and acknowledged church. Many have an idea that they are responsible to Christ alone for their light and experience, independent of his recognized followers on earth. But in the history of the conversion of Saul, important principles are given us, which we should ever bear in mind. He was brought directly into the presence of Christ. He was one whom Christ intended for a most important work, one who was to be "a chosen vessel" unto him; yet he did not personally impart to him the lessons of truth. He arrested his course and convicted him; but when asked by him, "What wilt thou have me to do?" the Saviour placed him in connection with his church, and let them direct him what to do. {LP 31.1}

Jesus is the friend of sinners; his heart is touched by their woe; he has all power, both in Heaven and upon earth; but he respects the means which he has ordained for the enlightenment and salvation of men; he directs sinners to the church, which he has made a channel of light to the world. {LP 31.2}

Saul was a learned teacher in Israel; but, while in the midst of his blind error and prejudice, Christ reveals himself to him, and then places him in communication with his church, which is the light of the world. In this case Ananias

represents Christ, and also represents Christ's ministers upon earth, who are appointed to act in his stead. In Christ's stead, Ananias touches the eyes of Saul that they may receive sight. In Christ's stead, he places his hands upon him, and, praying in Christ's name, Saul receives the Holy Ghost. All is done in the name and by the authority of Christ; but the church is the channel of communication. {LP 32.1}

Paul Enters Upon His Ministry

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Paul was baptized by Ananias in the river of Damascus. He was then strengthened by food, and immediately began to preach Jesus to the believers in the city, the very ones whom he had set out from Jerusalem with the purpose of destroying. He also taught in the synagogues that Jesus who had been put to death was indeed the Son of God. His arguments from prophecy were so conclusive, and his efforts were so attended by the power of God, that the opposing Jews were confounded and unable to answer him. Paul's rabbinical and Pharisaic education was now to be used to good account in preaching the gospel, and in sustaining the cause he had once used every effort to destroy. {LP 32.2}

The Jews were thoroughly surprised and confounded by the conversion of Paul. They were aware of his position at Jerusalem, and knew what was his principal errand to Damascus, and that he was armed with a commission from the high priest, that authorized him to take the believers in Jesus, and to send them as prisoners to Jerusalem; yet now they beheld him preaching the gospel of Jesus, strengthening those who were already its disciples, and continually making new converts to the faith he had once so zealously opposed. Paul demonstrated to all who heard him that his change of faith was not from impulse nor fanaticism, but was brought about by overwhelming evidence. {LP 33.1}

As he laboured in the synagogues, his faith grew stronger; his zeal in maintaining that Jesus was the Son of God increased, in the face of the fierce opposition of the Jews. He could not remain long in Damascus, for after the Jews had recovered from their surprise at his wonderful conversion and subsequent labours, they turned resolutely from the overwhelming evidence thus brought to bear in favour of the doctrine of Christ. Their astonishment at the conversion of Paul was changed into an intense hatred of him, like unto that which they had manifested against Jesus.

{LP 33.2}

Paul's life was in peril, and he received a commission from God to leave Damascus for a time. He went into Arabia; and there, in comparative solitude, he had ample opportunity for communion with God, and for contemplation. He wished to be alone with God, to search his own heart, to deepen his repentance, and to prepare himself by prayer and study to engage in a work which appeared to him too great and too important for him to undertake. He was an apostle, not chosen of men, but chosen of God, and his work was plainly stated to be among the Gentiles. {LP 33.3}

While in Arabia he did not communicate with the apostles; he sought God earnestly with all his heart, determining not to rest till he knew for a certainty that his repentance was accepted, and his great sin pardoned. He would not give up the conflict until he had the assurance that Jesus would be with him in his coming ministry. He was ever to carry about with him in the body the marks of Christ's glory, in his eyes, which had been blinded by the