

Have You Heard the Story of My Life?

Part 12: Saul

Dora Beck

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Saul



My name is Saul. I grew up in Tarsus. You might be wondering where this city is. Your question is appropriate, because this town is not well-known like Cairo, Damascus, or other big cities.

The city of Tarsus is situated on the banks of the river Kidnos in what is today southern Turkey. This city lies inward from the Mediterranean about 15 kilometres. It was the capital of Cilicia, a Roman state at that time.

The schools of Tarsus competed with those of Athens and Alexandria. I entered a school in Tarsus early in life and was educated in many sciences, in both the Greek and Roman languages.

My father was respected and pious. When I was a child, he had me memorise and obey God's commandments in the Torah. As I grew older, he sent me to Jerusalem to learn the holy laws in the Hebrew language under Gamaliel, the most famous teacher.

It was hard for me to leave my parents and brothers and sisters. It was also quite an adventure for me to travel by ship across the Mediterranean Sea. Everything was so new and exciting for me.



The ship was loaded with goods, and the sailors were busy preparing the sails on the mast. On our way, we passed many islands, big and small. Our ship stopped at several ports, to pick up new passengers and more goods.



After arriving in Jerusalem, a new phase in my life began. I sat at the feet of Gamaliel, the scholar, learning with all eagerness. His deep knowledge motivated me to thoroughly investigate the laws of Moses in the Old Testament for myself. These laws left a deep impression on my mind and behaviour.

My only wish was to put myself completely in the service of the Lord and to do His will, fighting for Him if necessary. Finally a time came when I could put my zeal to use.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor in those days, and he had Jesus of Nazareth crucified. The followers of Jesus lived in Jerusalem. They claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. I considered this the biggest blasphemy that could have been uttered. But the number of believers in Jesus was increasing constantly.



It was frightening that the followers of Jesus were performing signs and miracles in His name. As for me, I considered them liars and cheaters who should be forced to leave their heretical teachings or be put to death. The high priest tried to stop them from talking about Jesus, but to no avail. So the belief in the resurrected Christ spread like fire.

I was proud to watch the stoning of Stephen, one of the heretics. This man openly accused the high priest of killing the Messiah, so they carried him out of town to kill him. While he was being stoned, he lifted his eyes towards heaven, crying: Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God.

When I heard this talk, I closed my ears, not wanting to listen to such blasphemy. How could a person be so blind as to say that Jesus, who had been condemned, was sitting at the right hand of God?



It was my opinion that a fanatic such as Stephen should be executed immediately – but not only him; all followers of Christ should be killed, too, because they called the Nazarene the “Son of God.”

It became my wish to seize the believers in Jesus, so that none could escape. I started to spy on them when they gathered for meetings. I broke into their homes and cast both men and women into prison without mercy. But I was not satisfied with this alone.

I took all measures to try to make followers of Jesus deny their faith. With all my energy, I intended to please God and serve Him as His faithful servant.



When I received the news that the followers of Jesus had escaped to Damascus and were holding gatherings there, I did not hesitate to go to the high priest and request an authorisation to detain all those who loved Jesus and believed in Him.



I did not travel alone to Damascus but took a number of men with me to guard and help me with my plans. I attempted to round up all the followers of Jesus, both men and women, and take them to Jerusalem as prisoners.

It was noon when we approached Damascus. The sun was shining brightly, but suddenly a blinding light, much stronger than the rays of the sun, surrounded me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice call to me: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"



I answered, trembling with fright: O Lord, who are You? Then He answered me again: I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting.

Was Jesus alive, I wondered? Wasn't He dead? Truly, He must be the Son of God, I concluded. Within seconds, I knelt down frightened and asked, Oh Lord, what do You want me to do?

The Lord answered: Get up and go into the city. There it will be told you what to do.

When I got up from the ground, the light disappeared. I tried to open my eyes but it was all dark and I couldn't see anymore. Fright overcame me when I realised that I had lost my sight and become

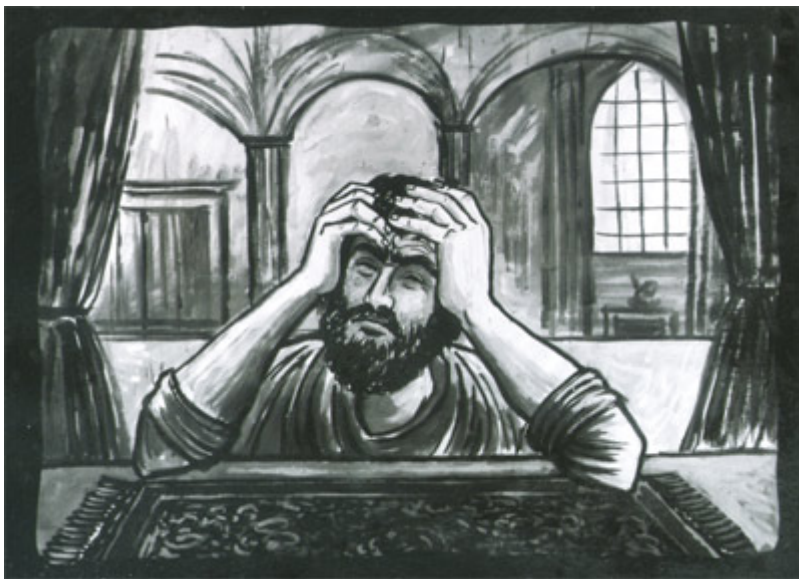
blind.

The men with me helped me find my way and led me to Damascus. They too had heard the voice but had not seen the light. In Damascus, we stayed in the house of a man who lived on Straight Street.



For three days I neither saw anything nor ate or drank. I was totally humiliated before the Lord when I realised my sin against Him. All the time prior to this incident, I thought of myself as righteous and innocent, firm in the true faith, pleasing and serving God. But in reality, I was persecuting the living God.

For the first time, my previous life looked completely different in the new light of God. Nothing good remained in me. I had no more rights in front of God. All my sin was like a wall between Him and me. I, the one who wanted to be the most zealous of all believers, found out that I was the worst of sinners!



The realisation of my desperate condition led me to pray earnestly. I cried out to the Lord and confessed all my sins to Him. He answered me and forgave me, taking away all my sins. Thus, although I was physically blind, it was then that I could truly see spiritually.

I realised that Jesus truly died on the Cross for sinners, that He rose from the dead, that He is now

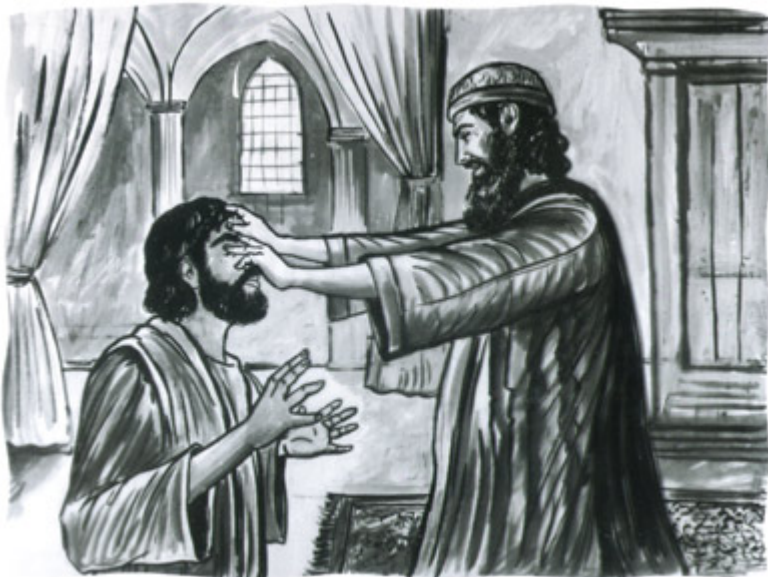
alive, sitting at the right hand of God.

When I believed in His grace, joy and peace filled my heart. I cannot explain to you this change, dear reader, but you can experience it yourself and understand the joy of the Lord in your heart.

When the Lord first saved me, I did not know what the future would hold. But one thing was clear: The Lord who met me on the Damascus road would guide and care for me.



The living God sent Ananias, one of Jesus' disciples in Damascus, to put his hands on my head and say: My dear brother Saul, the Lord who appeared to you has sent me to restore your sight. You will be filled with the Holy Spirit.



Immediately, something like scales fell from my eyes, and I could see again. That is how I experienced that Jesus can do miracles. He did not only heal my blindness, but He also healed my soul and enlightened my mind, fulfilling His promise: If the Son therefore shall set you free, you shall be free indeed(John 8:36).

I considered myself blessed with all spiritual blessing, because I had received the free gift of salvation. The Holy Spirit filled, comforted, and empowered me. He testified to my spirit that I had

truly become a Child of God.



There was no reason for me not to be baptised in the name of Jesus. Through this baptism, I openly declared that Jesus Christ is Lord and that I had given myself to Him as a servant eternally.

My state of sadness and fasting passed away, and I became delighted with joy and thanksgiving in the presence of my new spiritual Brothers and Sisters.

I could not keep my experience to myself, so I stayed in Damascus, teaching in Jesus' name at the schools and synagogues. All were amazed to hear that the one who had formerly persecuted the followers of Jesus had himself become one of them.

Some of the Jewish elders got angry with me and decided to kill me. Because of this, I had to escape from Damascus secretly by night. Some other believers lowered me down a wall in a basket, so that I could get outside the city. This is how I became an apostle of Christ. After some time, my name was changed to Paul.



Wherever I went, I declared that Jesus is the living Christ, the Saviour and Lord. Whoever believes these words can become a new and happy person like me.

Quiz

We hope you have enjoyed reading this story. Below are some questions about it. When you have answered them, mail them to us.

1. Where is Tarsus located?
2. Who was the famous teacher of Saul?
3. Why did Saul persecute the followers of Christ?
4. What made Saul fanatic?
5. How did Christ appear to Saul?
6. What did Saul realise in his despair?
7. How did Saul receive peace and joy in his heart?
8. What did Jesus command Ananias to do?
9. What was more important to Saul than receiving his sight again?
10. Why did Saul have to escape from Damascus?

Send your answers to us. Do not forget to print your full name and address clearly on your answer sheet as well as on the envelope. Our address is:

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