



# Never Been to Spain

The Journals & Journeys of Paul

## *"On the Goad Again"*

Saul the Punisher will be described as "breathing threats and murder" against Christians. The word for "breathing" is better translated *breathing in*. It's describing him as if he were a wild animal, a predator, sniffing his prey from miles away. His prey were in Damascus, Syria, and he got permission to go there and slaughter them.

Damascus was some 135 miles from Jerusalem. There was a large Jewish population as evidenced by Josephus's report that ten thousand Jews were massacred there in 68AD.

The trip would take several days, perhaps nearly a week. Although many artists have portrayed Saul as riding a horse to Damascus, he almost certainly was on foot. One scholar said, "artists make terrible commentators."

Sometime during that journey Saul was miraculously converted on the road to Damascus after he had an encounter with the risen glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

Is that the typical way a person gets saved? It may not be typical, but it was a type. By that I mean it was a type, a typology, providing an illustration, of something else.

Let me read the accounts - three of them in the Book of Acts - then point out why I think Saul's conversion was a type.

### Acts 9:1-9

1 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest

2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.

4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

That was Luke's account as it was told to him by Saul. The next two accounts are from Saul's lips. The first was to a Jewish audience.

### Acts 22:5-11

5 as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

6 Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.

7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'

8 So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'

9 And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.

10 So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.'

11 And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

The third account of what occurred on the road was given to Gentiles.

### Acts 26:12-20

12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13 at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.

14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul,

Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

15 So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,

18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,

20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

You will notice slight differences in the three accounts. It's mostly because of the different audiences being addressed.

There are also at least two significant differences. One account says that the men traveling with Saul "stood" while another says they fell to the ground. There are several possible explanations, the best one being that the word translated "stood" can mean *fixed* or *stationary*. They fell to the ground and they were fixed in that position for a time, unable to move.

Another seeming problem is that in the Acts 9 version the men are said to have "heard a voice" whereas in the Acts 22 version it says "they heard not the voice of Him who spoke."

Again there are any number of possible solutions, the best being that they heard Jesus speaking but did not understand His words the way Saul did.

Back to what I suggested - that Saul's conversion is a type. I think it is a type of the conversion of the Jews who are alive on the earth at the end of the Great Tribulation when Jesus Christ returns in His Second Coming and all Israel is saved as they look upon Him Whom they have pierced.

One reason I think that is the emphasis in all the accounts of Saul's conversion on the light.

Acts 9:3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a **light** shone around him from heaven.

Acts 22:6 Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great **light** from heaven shone around me...

11 And since I could not see for the glory of that **light**, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

Acts 26:13 at midday, O king, along the road I saw a **light** from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me...

This light was more, much more, than just a bright light. It is, in the Bible, the radiance of God's glory. Frequent biblical texts speak of God's glory in terms of light:

Psalm 76:4 You are resplendent with light, more majestic than mountains rich with game.

Psalm 104:2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent.

1 Timothy 6:16 Who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever...

When Saul was confronted on the road to Damascus, he saw the risen, glorified Lord. The light was the "light of His glory."

Saul was also told he would become a light:

Acts 26:17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,  
18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to **light**, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

Saul was also subjected to a temporary blindness. That might be the key fact that points to a typology.

Recapping - Saul saw the light of the glory of the risen Lord and was saved; he suffered a temporary blindness before bringing the light of the Gospel to the world.

Who else in the Scriptures is described as suffering from temporary blindness? It's the nation of Israel. Saul would later write concerning Israel,

Romans 11:7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

Romans 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Romans 11:26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;

When will Israel's blindness be removed and all Israel be saved? When the Deliverer comes. His coming is described by the prophet Zechariah.

Zechariah 12:10 "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

This is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, at the end of the Great Tribulation. Numerous passages describe Jesus' glory at His Second Coming. Second Thessalonians 2:8 says He will destroy His enemies by the brightness of His coming.

Jesus, then, will return in His glory, in a brightness exceeding the sun, and all blinded Israel will be saved.

Like Israel Saul on the road to Damascus was spiritually blind to Jesus being the Messiah and His Savior until Jesus appeared in His glory to reveal Himself.

His temporary physical blindness after meeting the Lord was to emphasize the spiritual blindness he had been operating under and that the Jews he would preach the Gospel to were still walking in. He could therefore better identify with the many Old Testament scriptures describing Israel's end times blindness.

He would receive his sight and go on to be a light to the Jews. He was, in a sense, typical of the light Jesus will be to Israel at His return when they are saved. He was a sort of first-light.

Saul's conversion, miraculous and unique, is typical, then, of the conversion of all the surviving Jews at the end of the Great Tribulation at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom on the earth for one thousand years.

Just because Saul saw the risen Christ it doesn't mean there was nothing typical about his conversion, i.e., typical of any conversion.

First, like all men and women everywhere, he was a sinner in need of salvation. He would later describe himself as the chief of sinners but stood as an example that whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.



Second, every conversion is a miracle. It wasn't the light that shone around Saul that transformed him but the light that shone within.

Second Corinthians 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...

Second Corinthians 4: 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Third, his salvation experience was all of grace and not by works of righteousness which he had done.

Fourth, a radical transformation took place as the persecutor and punisher of the church became a preacher of Christ.

There are other typical aspects in the midst of the typology of Israel's future salvation.

Something Jesus said to Saul should be discussed before we close. Jesus said to Saul, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

The goad was a long stick, sharpened on one end, that farmers used to prod their ox teams in the right direction. It has come to mean *something that encourage or drives; a stimulus*.

Two things (at least) suggest themselves:

First, God was at work encouraging, driving, stimulating Saul to receive Jesus Christ. Stephen's death as a martyr was a goad as Saul saw Stephen's angelic face and heard his prayer for

the Lord to forgive those who were killing him. That's a very hard thing to kick against.

The deaths of the other saints Saul persecuted were likewise goads.

In dramatic and undramatic ways God is always at work goading men to Christ. One of the ministries of God the Holy Spirit in the world is to goad men to Jesus.

Realize too that **you** are a goad to nonbelievers. They should see your angelic face as you endure troubles and hear you speak as the oracle of God in your compassion for them.

Second, it's all too possible for you as a believer to disobey God. As a disciple you are described as yoked together with Jesus. If you aren't walking in obedience to Him He will goad you. If you kick against God's goads **you hurt yourself**.

We ought to discover God's ways for our lives and follow them. If we refuse then it will bring nothing but hurt into our lives and, sometimes, into the lives of others.

Saul's conversion was really spectacular but it was no more miraculous than yours or anyone else's for that matter. God had something more to communicate through Saul to Israel and to us; that's all. It wasn't that Saul was so important that Jesus had to personally appear to Him in order to ensure his salvation.

O, and Saul was to be an apostle with a capital 'A'.' That, too, meant he must see with his own eyes the risen Lord; it was a

requirement of apostleship. It's one of the reasons why there are no apostles today.

Be encouraged! You might even look back on your encounter with Jesus, when you were saved, to see if there are any types that have held true to your walk with Him thus far.