



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Numbers, Deuteronomy Sermon Series

Supports Session 6: God's Plans

Sermon Title: "Saul's Conversion" (Acts 9:1-9)

Connection to Session 6

This morning's Bible study was about Balaam and his divine and shocking encounter. Balaam was traveling to Canaan to meet with the Moabite king, Balak. The journey did not go as expected. Today's sermon is about Saul, later called Paul, who was on a journey as well. His journey did not go as expected when he encountered the risen Lord.

Introduction/Opening

Detours are rarely fun. We can be traveling down a familiar path and then encounter the dreaded sign indicating a detour is ahead. If we are wise, we will heed the warning and follow the signs as directed. If, however, we tell ourselves that we can ignore the sign, then struggle will be ahead. When we do this, we convince ourselves that the sign does not apply to us. As we strike out on the dangerous trail, we encounter obstacles and will eventually return to where we first saw the sign. Today's sermon is one in which Saul started down a path he thought best. While traveling this path, he encountered the risen Savior. Instead of continuing down his desired path, he submitted to Christ, who used him in amazing ways.

Outline

1. Saul's life before Christ (vv. 1-2)

a) Saul was hostile toward the gospel (v. 1). To best understand this message, we need to place it in context. Acts 8 reveals that Stephen, a follower of Jesus, had been killed for his faith. The text reveals Saul, later called Paul, had been present and lent agreement to what was taking place.

In Acts 9, we learn Saul had continued to cause havoc for those who followed Jesus. The text reveals he "was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). Several words are vital in understanding what Saul was doing. The word "still" indicates a continual and ongoing action. This was not a new action for Saul; it was a way of life. His words were both threatening and murderous. This was much more than merely slander and rumor. Saul had fully embraced extremely hostile words toward those who were following Jesus.

b) Saul actively lived out his hostility (v. 2). His hostile words were not just words. The text reveals he was actively living out what he was saying. If we are wise and take the words of the Bible accurately, we will know that Saul's words are an indication of what was in his heart (Matt. 15:18). Therefore, we can discern that Saul's heart was not only far from Jesus, but it was also hostile toward Jesus and those who followed Him.

2. Saul's encounter with Christ (vv. 3-7)

a) Saul had a personal encounter with Jesus (vv. 4, 7). How many of us have heard a message or read a passage and knew that the Lord had just communicated to us? A common response to this may be that we look around and see if anyone experienced the same thing. Then, we come to realize they hadn't, and the message was for us.

Saul experienced something similar, but much more intense. He was on his way to persecute and imprison followers of Jesus. While on the road to Damascus, a heavenly light flashed around him, and he found himself in a conversation with Jesus. The text indicates those around him heard the sound but did not see anyone. As this encounter ensued, Jesus addressed Saul by name. This encounter was not by happenstance; it was personal.

b) Saul acknowledged Jesus as Lord (v. 5). Upon hearing his name, Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" Saul's language is revealing. He was on his way to live out his murderous words against Christians. Now, upon experiencing a light from heaven, and hearing his name, he addressed Jesus as Lord. Something had changed in Saul's understanding already.

3. Saul's response to Christ (vv. 8-9)

a) Saul responded in obedience (v. 8). Words are one thing but acts of obedience are something vastly different. As the conversation between Jesus and Saul continued, Jesus commanded Saul to "get up and go into the city" (v. 6). Verse 8 indicates that Saul got up. We do not see Saul asking those around him, who missed the encounter, their opinion. He was given a command, and he responded in obedience. We as a church can learn a great deal from Saul in this simple fact alone.

b) Saul responded in humility (v. 9). Let's recall that when Saul started out, he was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord (v. 1). Now, we find him not eating or drinking. If we continue in this passage, we discover Saul was baptized in obedience to Jesus's command (v. 18). The encounter with Jesus had changed Saul from a prideful man seeking to harm followers of Jesus, to an obedient man willing to submit to the ways of Jesus.

Conclusion

We can discern at least two personal responses from the passage. First, have we had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, in which we acknowledge Him as Lord and He changes us? If not, then let's not leave here today without having this encounter. If we have had this encounter, then let us be like Saul and obediently respond to His commands. Some may need to be baptized, and others may need to simply say yes to whatever He is calling us to be.

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