

Saul's Message

Acts 9:20—22

Saul's conversion happened sometime between Jesus Christ speaking to him on the road to Damascus and Ananias baptizing him in the city. The accounts given to us do not specifically indicate what gospel message was preached to Saul, or when it was preached. Many believe Jesus Christ personally preached the gospel message and Saul believed almost immediately. Many others think it was Ananias who was instrumental in Saul becoming saved. Jesus Christ would have shared the Gospel of Grace while Ananias was only familiar with the Gospel of the Kingdom.

It is interesting that there are a number of parallel connections between Cornelius' and Saul's conversions. Both were devout men of God, both heard directly from Jesus Christ, both were told that they would be told what to do. Cornelius finally heard the Gospel (of the Kingdom) when Peter showed up and it was then that he believed. Right after believing, Cornelius was baptized in the Holy Spirit. If these accounts are similar, then Saul would have been saved through Ananias and then received the Holy Spirit right after that. After receiving the Holy Spirit, Ananias (in accordance with the Gospel of the Kingdom) said that Saul should be baptized to wash away his sin, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). Why would Saul need to call on the name of the Lord then if he were saved earlier on the road to Damascus?

Following his salvation, there is no indication that Saul went out and preached the Gospel of Grace until after he went down to Arabia (Galatians 1:17). Immediately after he believed, he preached the name of Jesus, that He was Israel's Messiah (Acts 9:20; 26:19). His message to them was more in line with the Kingdom than with Grace. It is also strange that Saul would have believed so quickly after years of indoctrination as a Pharisee and with his zeal to wipe out anything and anyone to do with Jesus. It seems that he would have needed time to reflect on what happened to him on the road to Damascus.

The details of Saul's conversion are somewhat sketchy since Luke is not writing to show us how Saul was saved, rather that God was now dealing with the world in a completely different manner, apart from the nation of Israel. The whole book of Act chronicles Israel's fall and diminishing, not the rise of the church.

Saul preaches (verse 20)

After his meeting with Ananias, Saul stayed with the disciples, who were living in Damascus, for a number of days. During this time he went to the synagogues to preach Christ saying that He was the Son of God. He was preaching concerning what he had learned directly from Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. What Paul was preaching was in line with the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom, that they needed to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. This complies with Peter's confession when Jesus asked him who Peter thought He was (Matthew 16:16), the same reason that the Gospel of John was written (John 20:31). There is no hint that he was preaching what we would call today the Gospel of the Grace of God. This understanding points to Ananias as being the person who shared the Gospel with Saul, the same message Saul was preaching in the synagogues. His message obviously changed after he was given additional information about this new work that God was beginning apart from Israel (Acts 26:16).

Various ideas

If the above idea is correct, then Saul would have been saved under the Kingdom Gospel but still put into the Body of Christ as a pattern for all who would follow after him. Many mid-Acts believers reject this idea, and in so doing they are embracing that it was Jesus Christ who personally presented to him

the Gospel of Grace, and it was then that Saul believed and was saved. They see it being significant that Saul called Him Lord, and use this to prove Saul knew that Jesus was Deity, and that Saul then, in faith, had asked the Lord what he should do, proof that he had been saved. They also understand that when Jesus Christ stated that it was hard for him to kick against the pricks (Acts 9:5), a reference to Paul being goaded by God like a disobedient animal who wants to go his own way, that Saul was being convicted by the Holy Spirit. He certainly was being goaded by God, but that proves nothing about him being saved directly by the testimony of Jesus on the road to Damascus. Proof of Saul being saved through an encounter by Jesus involves doing a lot of reading between the lines. I don't deny that it is a possibility, only that there are a lot of holes in the proof of their posit.

In trying to understand what is going on in Acts 9, some say Paul was saved into the Kingdom program, but was later saved into the Grace program, becoming the first member of the Body of Christ. This explanation is often used as a way to explain away the "Jewishness" of what Paul was doing in his early ministry. Along with this, they assume that Paul was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom until the end of Acts. He certainly made sure to go to the Jew first (Romans 1:16), but it was with the Gospel of Grace. He used the Old Testament often in his sermons, but only to prove who Jesus Christ was. The sermons he preached in Damascus right after he was saved were based on his encounter with Jesus Christ and revolved around proof that He was the Messiah of Israel. These sermons were limited in information because he had yet to be personally trained by Jesus Christ concerning this Dispensation of Grace. It should be noted that Paul never once offered Israel the Kingdom, like Peter did. This point emphasizes that God was changing His dealings with Israel.

There are others who believe that there were two gospels being preached simultaneously. Those who heard the Gospel of the Kingdom are said to have an earthly Kingdom hope. Those who were saved under the Gospel of Grace would have a heavenly hope. Two gospels with two destinations in accordance to what was believed.

Shockingly (to many), there actually had to be two gospels being preached at the same time, at least for a while, because God had not yet fully revealed His program until some time after Saul was saved. It would also take time for that information to disseminate throughout the area from Jerusalem to Rome, and beyond (Acts 19:1—6). There were still people preaching the old Gospel of the Kingdom after the new Gospel of Grace was introduced. Some of these confusing issues become fodder for those who think having multiple gospels is teetering on the brink of heresy. Since Saul/Paul became the pattern for all who are to follow into the Body of Christ, and since Saul/Paul was saved in Acts 9, I believe that those who heard the Gospel of the Kingdom were saved into the Body of Christ. This is consistent with what happened after Jesus came as Israel's Messiah. Those who were believers before He came would all come to believe that He was their Messiah, none would be lost in the transaction (John 6:44—45). Those who heard the Gospel of the Kingdom and believed after Paul was saved most likely would come to understand the Gospel of Grace and fully believe Paul's Gospel for their salvation. Admittedly, Acts was a perplexing time and it is not easy, or even possible, to fully understand. It is important to interpret the book of Acts by Paul's 13 epistles and not interpret Paul's writings by the book of Acts.

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