

## THE LIGHT NEAR DAMASCUS

Not long after the church was established in Jerusalem a great persecution arose that scattered the disciples abroad. The opposing Jews wished to stamp out the religion of Jesus Christ, and they expected persecution to accomplish their desires. But the dispersion of the church meant the increase and growth of the Lord's cause.

In the work of persecution no name is more prominent than the name of Saul of Tarsus. **“He made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3).** He was not content to persecute the Lord's disciples in his own city, but went even to strange cities. On a mission of persecution we find Saul, with some companions, on the way to the city of Damascus. As they neared the city, there was a great demonstration. In the language of Saul himself, we have it related this way: **“And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light about me” (Acts 22:6).**

With respect to this heavenly light, the questions are often asked, “What was its purpose? Why did this light shine about Saul?” Some have thought it was evidence of his salvation and they have often insisted that such has been experienced by them. This, however, is a mistaken idea. The light did not shine around Saul as an evidence of his salvation. Neither did it appear for the purpose of saving him. I know that this heavenly light led, even directly, to his conversion, but that was not the purpose of the light. To understand the purpose of this light, we must keep some divine statements in mind. These may be found in the following:

During the personal ministry of Christ He selected a number of men to be His witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. These He called “apostles.” While the two words, of course, are not synonymous, they are applied to the same men. Apostles are those who are sent. Witnesses are those who testify of things they know from what they have seen. But the two words are so used of the same men that we almost think of them as interchangeable terms.

The apostles were to go into all the world to preach the gospel, and in so doing they were to testify concerning Christ. Hence, Peter declared, **“Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of**

**God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Acts 10:40-42).** There can be no doubt that the witnesses here mentioned were the apostles whom the Lord had chosen, and to them the Lord declared, **“Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).**

But for a man to be a witness of the Lord he must be qualified, and an essential qualification for a witness was that he must see the Lord after His resurrection. How could one testify that God had raised up Christ from the dead unless one saw Him after His resurrection? The necessity of this is shown in the proceedings by which one was selected to take the place of Judas. Judas was one of the apostles — one of those chosen to be witnesses. Therefore, someone who could testify of the resurrection of Christ was selected to be his successor. The divine record says concerning the matter, **“Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22).** As a result, Matthias was chosen. He could be a “witness of the resurrection” because he had seen the Lord after His resurrection — he was with them until the Lord was taken up from among them. No one then could be an apostle — a witness — unless he had seen the risen Lord. Keep this in mind as we study Saul.

The divine record tells us in plain words the purpose of that light — if we understand what caused the light. Jesus appeared to Saul as he neared Damascus. When He appeared, it was a glorious appearance. The glory of Jesus was so great that Saul was stricken blind. **“And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus” (Acts 22:11).** It was at this time that he saw Jesus, and His glory was so great that the physical eyes of Saul could not endure it.

Let us read the purpose of this appearance of the Lord. Was it to give proof of Saul's salvation? What was its purpose? When Saul reached Damascus and there waited for information that had been promised him, we learn the Lord sent Ananias, a disciple in that city, to him. Here's what he said to Saul when he arrived: **“The God of**

**our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard” (Acts 22:14-15).** How could Saul be His witness without seeing Him? He could not.

If we need it to be made any plainer to us, it is made so in Acts 26. Reading verse 16, we find the language of Saul as he later rehearses the matter, giving the Lord's words as they were spoken to him: **“But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose...”** Here we have it. The Lord is actually telling the “purpose” of His appearance to Saul — **“I have appeared unto thee for this purpose.”** For what purpose? To save him? To prove he was already saved? No. For what purpose then? **“I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.”**

The light was caused by the glory of the Lord. It shone in splendor because the Lord was there. The light appeared because the Lord appeared, but the Lord appeared to Saul to qualify him as a witness for Him. He must go out to testify of the risen Christ as an apostle to the Gentiles. Consequently we later hear Paul emphasizing his apostleship by a series of questions: **“Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1).** He *had* seen Jesus. He saw Him near Damascus, and was therefore qualified to be an apostle — a witness. For this reason the Lord appeared to him. This was the purpose of the light.

No such demonstration ever occurred in the conversion of any other man. There is a reason for it. All the other apostles had seen the Lord while He was on the earth. They also saw Him after His resurrection and before He ascended. No later appearance to them was necessary. But Saul did not see Him after He arose, and he had to see Him at a later day in order to testify. No witnesses have been chosen since Saul was chosen, and no such light has ever occurred in the conversion of any man since. There is no need for such today, for witnesses are not now being selected. It will not occur in your case.

**W. Curtis Porter from Charlottesville Beacon**

## **BIRTHDAYS**

Louise Dodson, 01-23; Jill Marcum, 01-23.

## **ILL**

**Sunday:** Millie Robertson (PM); Clara Scott, (PM).

**Wednesday:** Janice Carter; Millie Robertson.

Millie Robertson is awaiting her test results. Clara Scott is scheduled for knee surgery during the first week of February. Tom Tucker continues his eye treatment.

**Those battling cancer:** Ledgia Campbell, Betty James and Cleo Stone. Please remember these in your prayers.

## **HOME BOUND**

Kathleen Camp is in Room 101 at the Royal Terrace Nursing Home in Olathe. Marion Stone is at home. Barbara James' aunt, Evelyn Marquardt is at the Sweet Life of Rosehill in Shawnee. Please remember these in your prayers and visitation.

## **OUT OF TOWN**

Melissa Cole was out of town last Sunday. Chris Edwards was away last week. Clara Scott was visiting with relatives Wednesday night.

## **BUDGET PRESENTATION**

Our able treasurer, George Thomas, will present the 2009 budget this Sunday at 5:00 PM. All who have not heard the budget presentation are encouraged to attend.

## **MISSION WORK**

Brother Eugene Jenkins is laboring in Jamaica at this time. Brother John Shafer will be leaving on January 19 to labor in India and will return on February 4. Please remember these brethren in your prayers for their labors and safe travel.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Sunday AM, 48; Sunday PM, 33; Wednesday PM, 34.

*"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* **Galatians 6:9**

## **Those To Serve**

January 18, 2009

**BUILDING AND COMMUNION..... Nemechek**

### **MORNING WORSHIP**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS..... Trent Thrasher**

**SONG LEADER..... Joel Nelson**

**OPENING PRAYER ..... George Thomas**

**PRESIDE..... John Dodson**

**ASSIST..... Chris Edwards**

**ASSIST..... John James**

**CLOSING PRAYER..... Steve Brown**

### **EVENING WORSHIP**

**OPENING PRAYER ..... Jared Nelson**

**CLOSING PRAYER..... Jeff Nemechek**

**LORD'S SUPPER..... John Dodson**

### **WEDNESDAY 21st**

**SONG LEADER..... George Thomas**

**INVITATION ..... Jeff Nemechek**

## **WORSHIP SCHEDULE**

### **Sunday**

Bible Study ..... 9:30 AM

Morning Worship ..... 10:30 AM

Evening Worship ..... 6:00 PM

### **Wednesday**

Ladies Bible Study ..... 10:00 AM

Bible Study ..... 7:00 PM

**Preacher: Ted J. Thrasher**

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