

# WESTERN WISDOM BIBLE STUDY

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## *Saul and Stephen*

*(Continued)*

In the time of the early Christians the followers divided into two opposing factions such as are today termed conservatives and liberals. James the Just was leader of the conservatives; Stephen was prominent among the liberals. His martyrdom greatly strengthened the cause of the liberals and the Christian cult flourished in many new cities and countries.

After Stephen's death, Paul, his foremost persecutor, became the leading exponent of the universal Gospel which Stephen's memorable defense so nobly expounded in contradistinction to the narrow, Judaistic version espoused by the conservatives.

Throughout the checkered years of sunshine and shadow that marked the eventful life of Paul, Stephen was ever his friend and counselor, inspiring and strengthening, helping and guiding him. And when the good fight was over the course finished, and Paul, who had so gloriously kept the faith, entered at last into realms beyond the veil of flesh, Stephen's love welcomed him and Stephen's triumphant song mingled with the caroling of Angels.

### *Saul's Illumination*

After consenting to the death of Stephen, Saul, to stifle the upbraidings of his conscience, persecuted followers of Jesus with renewed vigor. He pursued them into other cities and, hearing that some of them had gone to Damascus, he secured permission from the Sanhedrin to follow and arrest them there.

*Acts 9:1-2*

*And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,*

*And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of them of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound into Jerusalem.*

With the same intensity which characterized his later work for Christ, Saul confesses that he created havoc in the church, entering into every house, seizing men and women and committing them to prison. His own words bespeak his deep contrition: "Many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them."

When Saul, eager and intent upon his cruel mission, came near the old and very beautiful city of Damascus, he met the transforming experience of his life.

*Acts 9:3-9*

*And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:*

*And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

*And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

*And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the*

*city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

*And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*

*And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*

*And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

Damascus is said to be the world's oldest still extant city and in the time of which we write it was one of the most beautiful. It is situated upon a plain, green and fruitful, over-looking the desert from an altitude of twenty-three hundred feet. The snow peaks of Hermon and the Lebanon ridge loom over the western horizon like a benediction and in striking contrast to the vast distances of arid desert and the colorful beauty of the city's immediate environs.

The Arabs refer to Damascus as one of the four terrestrial paradises. They say it was built by the Djinn. It is related of Mohammed that he surveyed only from the mountains the beauties of the city, refusing to venture nearer lest amid her delights he should forget the glories of Paradise. "Man," he declared, "has but one Paradise and mine is fixed elsewhere."

Reference has been made previously to certain Earth areas which are highly magnetized as centers of spiritual illumination. An area around Damascus has been so prepared, and it was for this reason that Saul of Tarsus was guided thither to receive his first illumination.

Damascus is a truly mystic city which every aspirant approaches when making initiatory contact with the Christ. Abram, like Saul, was moving toward Damascus when preparing for the inner illumination which so changed him that his name became *Abraham* — even as *Saul*, after such a great downpouring of spiritual power, was to become *Paul*.

On the road to Damascus Saul was first

enveloped in a resplendent aura of Christ Light. As his consciousness was absorbed into the splendor, he was blinded to the objective world for his sight was focused "in heaven." Then the great Christ Mystery was revealed to him. He was permitted to behold the Cosmic Record of that sublime event which began with Christ's Dedication to the work of salvation on Earth as long ago as the second Creative Day (Sun Period) and which will not terminate until every human being has been *Christed*.

### HIS MOMENTOUS JOURNEY TO DAMASCUS

Man's purpose and motive are paramount in the workings of Cosmic Law. Saul was sincere, his dedication earnest and complete. He was willing to give his life to exterminate this heretical Christian cult springing up all about him.

The phrase "three and a half days" so frequently used in mystic literature always refers to initiatory formulae familiar in the pre-Christian Dispensation.

Christ Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus and lifted him out of his physical consciousness. For *three and a half days* Saul studied Akasic Records and came to realize the purpose and meaning of Christ's regency of the Earth. He saw that this glorious archangelic Being, so far beyond race, cult or belief, had assumed responsibility for the entire Earth planet and its evolutionary life back in the Second Creative Day, the Sun Period; and His work must continue until every evolving life stream is perfected.

Saul's fine mind grasped the fact that he was not dealing with a new cult composed of a few individuals who could be exterminated by fire or sword. He learned that he was face to face with the basic elements of Earth life. Before the mission of the Lord Christ could be finished and this great Archangel freed from His bondage, the planet itself must become a Christed place — literally, a "new heaven and a new earth" — and every being upon it a Christed one.