



Was Saul Saved On The Road To Damascus?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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Was Saul saved while he was traveling on the road to Damascus? This question is often asked in connection with questions about the necessity of baptism today for salvation. Much of the religious world claims that Saul was saved while he was traveling on the road to Damascus – and claims that baptism, then, is not necessary for salvation. Yet, the Bible is clear on this often misinterpreted subject. Let's observe how the Bible answers this question.

The Biblical Record

I would encourage you to take some time to read through the Biblical record of Saul's conversion. His conversion is initially recorded in Acts 9:1-19. Then, Saul (later known as Paul) relates the story of his conversion in Acts 22:1-21 and in Acts 26:1-23. To gain an accurate understanding of Saul's conversion, you must actually consider each of these passages.

Each of these powerful passages describes the conversion of a man who had been a fierce enemy of God and of the gospel – who would then become a bold proclaimer of the gospel and an apostle of Jesus Christ! But, we want to especially focus on these passages to ask ourselves concerning the salvation of this man – and see whether he was saved while he was on the road to Damascus (before he was baptized) or whether he was not saved until he came into the city and was baptized. Let's consider some absolutely essential points to help us come to a proper conclusion.

The Lord Appeared To Saul Before He Had Faith

Some will claim that Saul was saved at the point when the Lord appeared to him when he was traveling along the road. However, please notice the text and consider that if this is true, then Saul was also saved before he had faith in Jesus Christ!

Notice carefully that whenever Christ first appeared to Saul that Saul fell to the ground – and heard the voice of the Lord. But, notice what followed. The first thing Saul said (according to

the text) was, “Who are You, Lord?” (vs. 5). Jesus then proceeded to tell Saul that He was Jesus, the one Saul was persecuting (vs. 5).

Saul simply could not have been saved at this point in time – because he did not yet have faith in Christ. In John 8:24, Jesus taught, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”

Saul’s Confession Did Not Save Him

While some may claim that Saul was saved at the point the Lord appeared to him, there are probably more people who would claim that Saul was saved at the point when he confesses Jesus Christ as Lord.

Saul refers to Jesus as “Lord” twice in this passage. As we’ve just noticed, one occasion is found in verse 5, when Saul asks, “Who are You, Lord?” The other occasion is recorded in verse 6 (you might note that this part of this verse is missing from some of the Greek manuscripts): “So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’”

Let’s look at each one of these references for a moment. The first reference, as we’ve already discussed, was not a confession of Saul’s faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You should again notice that Saul did not yet know it was Jesus who was speaking to him. The second reference, however, does furnish evidence that it was a confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. The text indicates that Saul knew it was Jesus Christ and was desiring to follow Him as Lord in His life!

However, you must understand that the Bible teaches this was *not* the point at which Saul was saved. As we’ll notice in greater detail in a few moments, consider that the second reference Saul makes to Christ as Lord (vs. 6) is connected with a question about what he needed to do in order to be saved. To this question, the Lord gives a very specific answer: “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (vs. 6). So, Saul could not have possibly been saved until the Lord told Saul what he needed to do in order to be saved! In addition, Jesus taught that those who confess Him as “Lord” will be eternally condemned if they do not obey the will of the Father (see Matthew 7:21-23). So, Saul needed to obey the Lord.

Ananias Did Not Call Saul A “Brother” In The Christian Sense

Some claim that Saul was saved on the road to Damascus because Ananias referred to Saul as “brother” when he met Saul (note that Ananias was the one appointed by God to teach Saul, see Acts 9:10-18). Acts 9:17 says, “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’” So, many will claim that Ananias is referring to Saul as a Christian “brother” at this point, indicating that he had been saved previously.

However, we need to understand that there are several different ways individuals in the Bible could refer to one another as being “brothers.” Thayer (a Greek scholar) tells us of at least three ways the Greek word for “brother” can be used: (1) Among those having the same parents (or having one common parent), (2) Among those of the same nationality, and (3) Among those who are Christians. Since this word can be used in several ways, we must consider the context of the passage to determine which is the proper meaning in *this* passage.

It is highly probable that Ananias is using the term in the sense of being Jewish brethren. This was very common practice among fellow Jews – even in contexts of Jewish Christians referring to Jewish unbelievers. For instance, when the apostle Peter was preaching the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, he addressed his audience by saying, “Men and brethren...” (vs. 29). A closer examination into who he was speaking to reveals that this was a Jewish audience (consider verses 5 and 22). So, Peter (a disciple and apostle of Christ) called Jewish non-believers “brethren.” But, this is not the only example of this. Peter also called Jewish unbelievers (evident from Acts 3:12-13) “brethren” in Acts 3:17. In Acts 13:26, Paul calls unbelieving Jews “brethren” (compare with Acts 13:16). Also, Paul calls unbelieving Jews “brethren” in Romans 9:1-5.

Therefore, it was not an uncommon practice for Christian Jews to refer to unbelieving Jews as “brethren.” I believe the same thing is true whenever Ananias refers to Saul as “brother” in Acts 9:17. Yet, it is certain that Ananias is not using the term in the sense of referring to Saul as a Christian brother – because the Biblical record clearly indicates that Saul was not yet a Christian (as we will continue to observe).

Saul Could Not Be Saved Without Obeying The Lord

As we seek the answer to the question, “Was Saul saved on the road to Damascus?” we must carefully look at the question and answer in Acts 9:6. In this verse, Saul asks the question – and Jesus gives the answer. The verse says, “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.’”

What did Jesus tell Saul he had to do in order to be saved? Notice that Jesus did *not* tell Saul there was nothing he needed to do – because he had already been saved! Instead, Jesus told Saul that he must arise and go into the city (the city of Damascus) in order to be told what he **must** do.

Think about the implications of Jesus’ statement on our question today! First, Jesus’ statement means that Saul could not have been saved on the road to Damascus because Jesus told him he had to go into the city in order to learn what he needed to do to be saved. Second, Jesus’ statement means that Saul could not have been saved on the road to Damascus because he did not know what he needed to do in order to be saved until he came into Damascus and was taught by Ananias.

So, if we want to learn what Saul had to do in order to be saved, we must follow him into the city and listen to what he was taught by Ananias. Jesus told Saul that he would be told what he **must** do when he came into the city.

The Bible teaches us exactly what Saul was taught by Ananias when he came into the city – and tells us that he was told that he needed to be baptized in order to have his sins washed away (forgiven). Consider Acts 22:16: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” So, Saul simply could not have been saved on the road to Damascus – since he had not yet been told what he needed to do in order to be saved and he had not yet been baptized for the forgiveness of his sins (note that he was obedient to this instruction to be baptized in Acts 9:18)!

Conclusion

Saul was not saved when he was traveling on the road to Damascus. Consider this. First, *if* Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, then he was saved before he knew it – because he obeyed the Lord’s instruction to go into the city in order to be told what he needed to do to be saved and he was still baptized for the remission of his sins. Second, *if* Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, then he was saved before Ananias knew it – because Ananias still taught Saul what Saul needed to do in order to be saved, including that he commanded Saul to be baptized for the forgiveness of his sins. Third, *if* Saul was saved on the road to Damascus, then he was saved before the Lord knew it – because the Lord is the one who told Saul to go into the city to be taught what he had to do by Ananias.

However, the simple fact of the matter is that Saul was *not* saved on the road to Damascus. Instead, he was saved whenever he obeyed the Lord’s instruction to go into the city, was taught by Ananias, and was baptized for the remission of his sins (compare Acts 22:16 and Acts 9:18)!

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