

Damascus

“Spreading the Gospel”



“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

Damascus, the capital of Syria, is mentioned many times in the Old Testament although we only think of the city with the conversion of Paul. It is mentioned in Genesis with Abram before he was renamed Abraham. Some people believe Damascus is a key city in Christianity, and interpret the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah that Damascus will be destroyed someday and never restored.

Saul, a Pharisee, was on his way to Damascus to stop the spread of Christianity. Saul was a perfect match to help spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was born in Tarsus and was very well educated in the Old Testament prophecy. He knew the Greek language and cultures. Damascus had a large population of Christians. It was the perfect place for Saul to do his persecution of those who had chosen to follow Christ. As Saul started out on his journey, I think he was determined that he was doing the right thing. Saul seemed to be one of those people who was diligent in whatever he was doing. He was what we sometimes call a “workaholic.” Sometimes things happen along the way of our journeys that totally change the direction we are going. It may be a geographical location like Damascus, or it might be an incident in our life that changes our opinion or even our complete life style or thoughts. I don’t think Saul had any inkling that this trip was anything out of the ordinary. But God had a plan to help people learn about his love. Damascus was a good town. It had a long history. The people had known about God’s love for years, and Stephen was one of its citizens who was willing to give his life for Christ.

According to Scripture, Saul had been in Damascus when Stephen was stoned to death and the people laid their coats at his feet as a sign of allegiance to him. He didn’t do the stoning; he was the boss!!! His job was to finish the job of getting rid of the people who had come to believe that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. But all of a sudden while he was returning to Damascus he was blinded. For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink. Saul had heard a voice say “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (*Acts 9:4,NIV*). Christ answered “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” (*Acts 9:5-6,NIV*)

Saul was met in the city by a man named Ananias. Jesus had appeared to him in a vision and told him to go to Saul. Ananias was not too anxious; Saul's reputation had preceded him and Ananias feared for his life. Ananias laid his hands on Saul, and his sight was restored. His name was changed to Paul. He stayed in Damascus a few days and then started his journey to other towns telling others about Jesus as a Savior rather than trying to kill people that had believed in Christ while he was persecuting them.

With the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus we see that Jesus wanted the gospel to go to the Gentiles. In one moment of fear, Saul understood that Jesus was indeed the true Messiah and that Christ knew he had helped murder and imprison innocent people.

Saul knew the Old Testament well. He knew what was right, but he didn't do it until We are sometimes like that. We know what we should do, but we sometimes do what is convenient, or what we feel like doing at the time. The people of Damascus were like that also. They were a strong people; their town had survived from the time of Abraham, but they were still sinners. Saul's conversion had to have made a strong impression of them.

Christ helps us to overcome sin today, just as He did the people of Damascus. I am reminded of a book we studied many years ago in a Bible study, Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth by Hal Lindsey. The conflict mentioned in this book is the same one that faced the people of Damascus and still faces us today. In fact, we can trace it back to the Garden of Eden. The people change, but the sins are still there. Satan has not nodded off to sleep.

Prayer: Thank you for people like Stephen and Paul who were willing to put their lives in danger so that we may know about your love today. Thank you for people like Ananias who were willing to do what Christ asked him to do instead of making a lame excuse. Help us to show that same zeal as we live our lives so that future generations may also know the wonderful love we enjoy today. Amen.

1. We may not have the same conversion that Paul had, but are we willing to surrender our life to Christ?
2. Do you think God expects the same dedication of you that Paul had?
3. How can each one of us help spread the good news with the talents we have been given?
4. Stephen, a citizen of Damascus, willingly gave his life because his faith was so strong. He didn't have the same experience as Paul. He was just one of the people of Damascus that "walked the talk". Are we willing to be like Stephen?