

## Conversion of St Paul 25<sup>th</sup> September

As he set out on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus Paul's intentions probably were to seek out and arrest more groups of followers of Jesus and bring them back to Jerusalem to be tried and possibly executed. He believed they were mocking the covenant made by God to the Hebrews and the Jewish Law by stating that Jesus was the Son of God and had brought a new way of life. We know from the Acts of the apostles that he was present at the stoning of Stephen. Paul also mentions his pre-conversion life in two of his epistles, the one to the Galatians (1:13-14) and the one to the Philippians. The longest descriptions of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus occur in the Acts of the Apostles where there are three references to what happened.

. *In Acts chapter 9*

"As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him, He heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you Lord?" Saul asked,



"I am Jesus, who you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do."

The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Paul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

The account continues with a description of Ananias receiving a divine revelation telling him to visit Saul at a house in Damascus and there lay his hands on him to restore his sight. Ananias was naturally reluctant and rather frightened. But in the end, he obeys and goes to the house.

*Conversion of St Paul by Caravaggio*

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me here so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit," Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food regained his strength.

There are two more references in Acts to the conversion. One in Acts 22: 6-21 when he was arrested and speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem. Another is in Acts 26: 12-18 when Paul was speaking to King Agrippa.

There are slight differences in the description of the events which took place on the road to Damascus but generally these are thought to be because of the audience Paul was addressing and also the translation.

The importance of Paul's conversion is that God can use even His greatest enemies, in this case His greatest persecutor. He is converted from First Century Judaism to a faith centred on Jesus Christ and he becomes the Apostle to the Gentile