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in 26. 16-18, Paul gives, as though it were a direct commission from Jesus spoken on the Damascus road, the charge which he received three days later through Ananias. The most simple and satisfactory explanation of this is that Paul did not deem it wise or necessary to go into all the details before Agrippa, and, in condensing his narrative, properly described words spoken by the servant and agent of Jesus as if they were his own personal commission. Such abbreviation seems entirely warranted. On the other hand, such variations as these should warn us against an unnaturally rigid interpretation of every phrase in sacred history.

10. The Lord said unto him in a vision, Ananias. From verse 12 we learn that Saul had "seen a man named Ananias coming in, and laying his hands on him." Both men were prepared for their coming interview by heavenly visions. Ananias certainly had prejudices against Saul which needed to be removed, and it seems not improbable that Saul, too, needed to be made willing to receive divine healing and revelation at the hands of an obscure believer. A parallel instance of a pair of visions fitting two men for a critical interview is found in the next chapter—the visions of Cornelius and Peter.

19. He was certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. With this statement and that of the succeeding verse, "straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus," it is interesting to compare Paul's account in his letter to the Galatians (1. 15-17). In this epistle Paul is defending his claims as an apostle who had received an immediate revelation of Christ and commission from him against the false charges of his enemies. He writes: "When it was the good pleasure of God . . . to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me: but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas." The word translated "straightway" in Acts 9. 20, is the same as tant rendered "immediately" in Gal. 1. 16. The sojourn in Arabia either preceded all Paul's preaching in Damascus, in which case its true place in this narrative would be between verses 19 and 20; or it was included in the period which is vaguely described in verse 23 by the words "many days." Luke gives a rapid sketch of the outward events in Paul's career, while the apostle himself is recording the crises of his inner history. The visit to Arabia was perhaps brief, and was of no special moment to Luke's narrative. But from Paul's point of view that period of communion with God and his own soul was of vital importance.

The Lesson Council.

Question 1. *What were the "pricks" against which Saul was kicking?*

The "goad" was the Spirit of God speaking through his conscience, but obscured by diverted attention to other ideas of duty. It might be called the conscience of semiconsciousness, of which many are still possessed. It is nevertheless persistent. Saul must have had some misgivings in going contrary to the advice of his revered instructor, Gamaliel (Acts 5. 34-39), and must have felt the "goad" on beholding the death of Stephen. The strong principle in Saul's being was duty, but it was dominated by a wrong preconceived idea of action (Acts 22. 3, 4; 26. 9), the result of education. It was a conflict of ideas in a man of strong will and intense individuality. He only needed greater illumination to see his error. He was illuminated gloriously, when he at once inquires, "What wilt thou have me to do?"

1. His natural aversion to the work of a persecutor. It takes hard-hearted men to persecute. Saul was, by nature and education, tender hearted. 2. The reasoning of his old teacher weighed upon him (Acts 5. 34-40). 3. The example of relatives who had become Christians (Rom. 16. 7). 4. Stephen's argument in the synagogue, his address before the council (Acts 6. 9-10; 7. 2-53), and his subsequent triumphant death (Acts 7. 59-60) convinced Saul of the divinity of the Christian religion. 5. His conscience.

The "goad" against which Saul kicked was "conviction for sin" so intense that resistance was vain. This conviction rested on certain facts: 1. He had done evil to the saints at Jerusalem (verse 13; chap. 22. 19, 26; 10). 2. He had threatened all disciples of Jesus (verse 1), and deliberately obtained authority to hunt them in strange cities (verse 14; chap. 26. 11), especially Damascus (chap. 9. 2). 3. He had witnessed against the first martyr, Stephen, and consented to his death (chap. 22. 20). The signal miracle (chap. 9. 9) and the vision of the crucified Lord (chap. 9. 17; 26. 16) showed him that Jesus whom he persecuted was the Christ. The goadings of conscience were well nigh irresistible.—*Rec.*

The "pricks" or goads against which this ox had been kicking were the qualms or remonstrances of conscience. Saul had many misgivings, which he endeavored to stifle, as to the righteousness of his doings. The dying prayer of Stephen followed him, and the noble bearing of the inoffensive saints he was dragging to prison deeply impressed him. These inward conflicts with himself, with his better nature, with the Holy Spirit,