

Acts 9.1-19

A Man for the Nations

Religious CONVERSION > Baffles the SECULAR World, MEDIA Curious
 NOT ONLY Christians > Possible to BE CONVERT to ANY RELIGION
 UNPOPULAR with SOME > ARROGANCE, PRESUMPTION
 CHANGE People, How do YOU know WHAT they NEED, Have CURE?

NEWS > Conversion of Malcolm Muggeridge, Bob Dylan, Tony Blair
 Acts 9 = MOST Famous Story of RELIGIOUS CONVERSION in History

2nd Greatest Event in Church History > After Sending of Spirit on Pentecost
 Event Recorded THREE Times in CONCISE, BRIEF History of Early Church
 One of Greatest Events in Western Civilization > Legacy of Churches, Letters

18th C England – 2 Young Lawyers – George Lyttleton and Gilbert West
 Unbelievers > GOAL to Bring Down the Foolish Idea called Christianity

Christianity stands upon a very unstable foundation. There are only two things that actually support it: the alleged resurrection of Jesus Christ and the alleged conversion of Saul of Tarsus. If we can disprove these stories, which should be rather easy to do, Christianity will collapse like a house of cards.

letter from George Lyttleton to Gilbert West

West > Write a Book to Disprove Resurrection / Lyttleton > Saul's Conversion
 Worked Independently > Met Months Later > SURPRISE! Both CONVERTS!
 Books ATTEMPT to PROVE HISTORICITY of Resurr & Paul's Conversion

Text Focuses on 2 Men –

1. Wild Man Tamed

2. Timid Man Witnesses

1. Wild Man Tamed

a. What Jesus meant to Saul – Filled him with ANGRY RAGE

NO RECORD of Saul mtg Jesus BEFORE > Both in JERUSALEM, Possible?
Paul about Jesus: “from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.
Though we once regarded Christ in this way...” 2 Corinthians 5.16

STRONG OPINION of JESUS > Formed thru KNOWING FOLLOWERS

1) Anger > Thought PREACHERS of the WAY were LIARS > Jesus HOAX

v. 1 Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

BREATHING OUT = Angry Animal > EVEN his BREATH is DANGEROUS

MURDER: Deep ROOT of ANGER, BITTERNESS > RIPENED to MURDER

RELIGIOUS ANGER Can Be VERY TERRIFYING > Rages in World Today
Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. Psalm 139.21-22

I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man 1 Timothy 1.13

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I
persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. Galatians 1.13

STILL Breathing Out Threats > BEGAN in Chapter 7 – STEPHEN’S Death

...they all rushed at him, (Stephen) dragged him out of the city and began to stone
him. Meanwhile, the *witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named
Saul...Saul was there, giving approval to his death.* Acts 7.58,8.1

Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men
and women and put them in prison. Acts 8.3

Verb describes WILD ANIMAL MANGLING its VICTIMS

TARGET: Men & Women – i.e. WOMEN had PROMINENT Role in Church

REASON for ANGER > Hellenists: NEW Challenge to OLD RELIGION

"This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." Acts 6.12-14

THOUGHT Followers of Jesus: Against Moses and against God

Jesus: FALSE Messiah CURSED by God > Messiah: CROWN NOT CROSS

If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree...*anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.* Deuteronomy 21.22-23

CROSS Proves Jesus of Nazareth NOT CHRIST > CRIMINAL Not KING!

ISLAM: 'ISA is HONORED PROPHET > ALLAH Never allow MURDERED

FIVE TIMES Koran says 'Isa did NOT die on a Cross!'

...Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews... 1 Corinthians 1.23

SPEECH to JEWISH MOB trying to KILL HIM - Paul: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was *just as zealous for God as any of you are today.*

Acts 22.2,3

2) Frustration > Can't KILL the MESSAGE – BLOOD Makes it SPREAD

...a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem ... Those who had been scattered *preached the word wherever they went* Acts 8.1,4

BELIEVERS in Jerusalem SCATTERED > Damascus 150 Miles. NORTH

'a beautiful white city on a green plain' - ONE WEEK's TRAVEL

OVER 10,000 Jews in DAMASCUS > Many God-Fearing GENTILES

30 to 40 Jewish SYNAGOGUES in DAMASCUS > Growing # of Christians

vs. 1,2 He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

Acts 26.11

Instead of DESTROYING the FAITH -- he DISPERSED the FAITH

IRONY – as SAUL Steamed NORTH in ANGRY FURY...

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "*Go south* to the road - the desert road - that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch...

Acts 8.26-27

NORTH – SOUTH – EAST –WEST > KINGDOM of JESUS ADVANCES

With Every NEW Follower > ANGRY SAUL is MORE FRUSTRATED

b. What Jesus made of Paul

Saul, who was also called Paul...

Acts 13.9

Two NAMES from BIRTH > Roman Name PAUL, ‘Saul’ HEBREW Name

Wife – English Name, Chinese Name, and Hawaiian Name

1) Conviction > ANGRY Paul KNOCKED OFF his HIGH HORSE

vs. 3-5 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

CALL of Jesus: ‘Saul, Saul’ / CALL of God ‘Moses, Moses’ ‘Samuel, Samuel’

The Hound of Heaven was CHASING the CHASER

Suddenly in this remote place...without a Christian anywhere around – there was a light from heaven, God spoke, and God was Jesus. James Boice

2) Conversion > NEW BIRTH > Wd. Lit. ‘TURN AROUND’

SUDDEN? > Final STEP was DRAMATIC > End of PROCESS in his Life

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? *It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'*

Acts 26.14

Sharp GOAD – Pronged Stick – Used to TAME Wild OX > BREAK THEM

WILD PAUL > Fighting Hard – and Hurting – Against God’s Saving Plan

The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and his compulsion is our liberation.
C.S. Lewis

ONE SHARP Goad > LAW of MOSES...

PHARISEE > Right with GOD by STRICT OBEDIENCE, LAW KEEPING

Commands 1-9 – OUTWARD ACTIONS > Kept Perfectly! SO IMAGINED!

10th Comm > COVETING > INWARD, SEARCHING, EXPOSED HEART

I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.
Romans 7.7-8

Another GOAD > NOBLE Example of STEPHEN 1st MARTYR of Jesus –

STEPHEN > Face to face with ARTICULATE, KNOWLEDGEABLE Xtian

KNEW Hebrew Scripture as Well – Maybe BETTER? – Unplanned SPEECH

LAST WORDS > Claimed to SEE Heaven OPENED – SON OF MAN Himself

Could Stephen have been lying?...At that moment, the moment of his death, when he was to appear before the great Judge of all?...If this was a deception, it was deception of the most remarkable order. ...I suspect that Saul asked himself whether he could have died like that...Did he have a moral character that could ask for forgiveness of his murderers at the moment he was being killed? James Boice

GOD GOADED Saul to REPENTANCE & FAITH > How is He GOADING you?

If HOUND of Heaven is ON YOUR TRAIL – He will WIN YOU to Himself

RUN? – He is Faster / FIGHT? – He is Stronger / ARGUE – He is Wiser

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.
Isaiah 9.2

FAMOUS Conversion > UNIQUE Features – Pharisee, Damascus, Apostle

We call this event a ‘conversion,’ but it was more like a volcanic eruption, thunderstorm and tidal wave all coming together. If the death and resurrection of Jesus is the hinge on which the great door of history swung open at last, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was the moment when all the ancient promises of God gathered themselves up, rolled themselves into a ball, came hurtling through that open door and out into the wide world beyond. N.T. Wright

NOT MODEL for ALL OTHERS > Peter – ‘fits and starts’ / Timothy ‘infancy’

KEY ELEMENT > Shared by ALL True CONVERSIONS > KNOW JESUS

the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...that I may gain Christ...faith in Christ...I want to know Christ Philipians 3.8-10

Jesus: “this is eternal life – to know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ the one you sent” John 17.3

WITHOUT KNOWING JESUS there is NO ETERNAL LIFE!!

3) Consecrated > ‘Set Apart’ Made HOLY

v. 17 “...you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit”

God...was pleased to reveal his Son in me Galatians 1.16

FELL OFF HIGH HORSE >> ENROLLED in School of HARD KNOCKS

v. 7,8 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus.

SAUL: Man with ALL ANSWERS > Did NOT Know what to Say

SAUL: Servant of GOD of LIGHT > BLIND and CONFUSED

SAUL: LEADER of Pharisees > LED by UNCLEAN HANDS of SERVANTS

MORE He FIGHTS > DEEPER the GOADS Pierce his STUBBORN SOUL

vs. 9,11 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything...for he is praying.

PRAYING was MORE IMPORTANT and URGENT than EATING

PRAYED Many YEARS > Now KNOWS the GOD He is TALKING TO

Knows 'ABBA' FATHER > God and FATHER of our LORD JESUS CHRIST

Much SIN to REPENT OF > Much GRACE to RECEIVE: Now FORGIVEN!

Prayer is the autograph of the Holy Ghost upon the renewed heart. Charles Spurgeon

WORLD > 'Conversion' = BRAINWASHING, Loose your PERSONALITY

Divine grace does not trample on human personality...it enables human beings to be truly human. It is sin which imprisons; it is grace which liberates. The grace of God frees us from the bondage of our pride, prejudice, and self-centeredness, enabling us to repent and believe. John Stott

Paul found TRUE FREEDOM as BOND SERVANT of LORD JESUS

LUKE the MEDICAL DOCTOR writes... v. 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again.

It confirmed everything Saul had been taught; it overturned everything Saul had been taught. The law and the prophets had come true; the law and the prophets had been torn to pieces and put back together in a totally new way. N.T. Wright

4) Calling

v. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

GONE to Damascus > TO OBEY God (he thought) > NOW Meets TRUE God

GIVEN ASSIGNMENT > Willingly, Immediately OBEYS

ANGRY BULL > NOW was DOCILE LAMB

v. 7 The men traveling with Saul...heard the sound but did not see anyone.

OTHERS Heard > OBJECTIVE Event, VERIFIABLE, Not Mystic, Subjective

NOT SEE > NOT Called to be APOSTLES

Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? 1 Corinthians 9.1

vs. 15,16 This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

Like MASTER > Journey to CROWN – along Pathway of the CROSS

Chapters 13 – 20	Chapters 24 – 26	Chapters 22, 28
Before Gentiles	Before Kings	Before the People of Israel

God's wonderful hand was clearly seen in that the cruel wolf was not only turned into a sheep but also assumed the character of a shepherd. John Calvin

Modern Church > We DECIDE for Christ > DECISION Made BY JESUS

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last. John 15.16

I press on to take hold of that for which *Christ Jesus took hold of me*. Philippians 3.12
25 Years LATER > Testifies to PRESSING On > Work APPREHENDED FOR

The Hebrew of Hebrews would become the apostle to the Gentiles: the persecutor would become the preacher; and the legalistic Pharisee would become the great proclaimer of the grace of God. Warren Wiersbe

5) Credit > GRACE is All from God – GLORY goes All to God

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ
Ephesians 3.7-8

Many SELF RIGHTEOUS RELIGIOUS People > ANGRY if called SINNER

POWER of Paul's Ministry > Life-Long CONSCIOUSNESS of his SIN

Wrote 20 YEARS AFTER this Damascus Road ENCOUNTER with Jesus:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - *of whom I am the worst*. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

1 Timothy 1.15-16

Christ Jesus CAME INTO THE WORLD to SAVE SINNERS

Not to MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD or GIVE You a Lamborghini Diablo

Amazing GRACE of Salvation and SERVICE

EXAMPLE > God can save HIM > ANYONE is SALVAGEABLE!

If we are INSTRUMENTS – as God calls PAUL – then God alone is the AUTHOR

The PLAN and the POWER come from God ALONE

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Galatians 6.14

CONCLUSION of CRITIC who became CONVERT after Careful Study....

I shall take it for granted that Paul was not deceived by the fraud of others, and that what he said of himself cannot be imputed to the power of deceit, no more than to willful imposture or to enthusiasm...It follows that what he related to have been the cause of his conversion...did all really happen, and therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation...It must be...accounted for by the power of God.

Baron George Lyttleton, *The Conversion of St. Paul*

2. Timid Man Witnesses

PAUL HERO > INSPIRES // ANANIAS - More LIKE US > Great EXAMPLE!

a. Reluctant > HONEST Doubts – Maybe SAUL was FOOLING GOD!

vs. 10-14 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

1st Time CHRISTIANS – Followers of THE WAY – are called SAINTS

God said Saul PRAYING > Ananias wondered if SPELLING – P-R-E-Y

PROBABLY TRICK > Fifth Column Infiltration of the Enemy

‘I KNOW God CAN Save...like PAUL ...but NOT him, her, not THAT PERSON!’

FAMILY Member – FRIEND – Spouse – CHILD – COLLEAGUE – ENEMY?

COMMON DISCONNECT > Between Faith in HEAD and in our HEARTS

LONGEST DISTANCE Sometimes between HEAD and HEART

b. Responsible > SAFEST Place is in GOD’S WILL > Even before LIONS!

vs. 15,19 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go!...Then Ananias went to the house and entered it....He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

NAME Ananias NOT KNOWN by Many > IF know it’s WRONG ONE – ch 5

If was NO RESPONSIBLE Ananias > Then NO UNFORGETTABLE Paul

Important thing about MINISTRY is NOT FAME but FAITHFULNESS

Paul: "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there." Acts 22.12

MORE RESPONSIBILITY is GIVEN to the RESPONSIBLE

IMPORTANT Ministry is OFTEN ORDINARY

BLINDING LIGHT & HEAVENLY VOICES > Makes GREAT THEATER

PRAYED – BAPTIZED (outside in stream!) – FED Damascus JOWZA

BAPTIZED and FED him TOO > Loving Care for PHYSICAL & SPIRITUAL

April 21, 1855 > Edward Kimball led boy in SS Class to RECEIVE JESUS

SS Class?? MANY CHURCHES --- TEACHING SS Never HIGH on LIST of Most

Boy was DWIGHT MOODY > Became Greatest Evangelist of GENERATION

God COULD have sent ANGEL > But He sent ANANIAS – and You, and Me!

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? (*or Ananias?*) Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task... each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers...

1 Corinthians 3.5-9

AMAZING Responsibility: GOD'S GRACE placed in HUMAN HANDS

God's Plan for GENTILE NATIONS: 'ends of earth' > CRITICAL MOMENT

Before Story of Paul > ETHIOPIAN Eunuch – 1st GENTILE Saved

After Story > CORNELIUS, Roman Officer – 2nd Gentile Saved > STAYED

NOW > CONVERSION of APOSTLE to Gentiles > MAN for the NATIONS

c. Relationship > First Words New Child of God heard 'BROTHER'

v. 17 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 so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."...

1st Christians COULD Think of MANY Other NAMES for SAUL of Tarsus

Probably Like to PUT HANDS AROUND HIS NECK! Now KINDNESS!

HE'S FAMILY NOW! Whether they LIKE IT OR NOT! BROTHER!!

It must have been music to his ears!

John Stott

LAST Appearance of RISEN JESUS in Book of Acts... Last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am 1 Corinthians 15.8-10

ABNORMALLY > Lit ABORTION, STILL-BORN > BROTHER by GRACE

BAPTISM > SYMBOL of FAMILY MEMBERSHIP > Links to All Believers

HARD to IMAGINE > All the IDEAS Flooding PAUL'S HEAD

Great Learning > Knowledge of Scripture > FULLY OPEN w/ Key of Jesus

...to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read...only in Christ is it taken away...But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

2 Corinthians 3.13-16

FIRST SERMON – Only Time Title used in ACTS

v. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that *Jesus is the Son of God*

New RELATIONSHIPS– God and His Son – With Sisters & Brothers in Him

How can believers in countries like Rwanda call each other 'brother' after the 1994 genocide? Such a change is only possible through the power of the risen Saviour, who has broken down the barriers of enmity. Paul Mumo Kisau

HOW about YOU? ALIVE in Christ? > SISTER or BROTHER His FAMILY?

Have you been TAMED by Him to TELL OTHERS about HIM?!

October 1857 > Hudson Taylor began PREACH Christ in NINGPO, CHINA

Led Chinese man named Mr. NYI to Faith in Jesus

NYI to Taylor "How long have you known this GOOD News in ENGLAND?"

Taylor – With SOME EMBARRASSMENT – 'For Many CENTURIES!'

NYI – "Why didn't you come SOONER? My Father died looking for TRUTH"

NATIONS Still WAITING for CHURCH from ALL NATIONS to Come!

Acts 9:1-19

1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. 11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." 13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." 17 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 so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.