

Acts 9.1-22

A Chosen Instrument to Carry God's Name

Acts 9 = MOST Famous Story of Religious CONVERSION in History

2nd Greatest Event in Post-Resurrection Church History: 1st Pentecost

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 2 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 > Book to Disprove Resurrection / Lyttleton > Saul's Conversion

Worked Independently > Met Months Later > Surprise! Both Converts Wrote Books: Prove HISTORICITY of Resurr & Paul's Conversion

ANY Religious Conversion Baffles SECULAR World, MEDIA Curious

1 Greatest Events in Western Civilization: Legacy of Churches, Letters

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?

“from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer” 2 Corinthians 5.16

Had Strong Opinion of JESUS > Formed thru Knowing Followers

1) Anger > Thot Preachers of the WAY were LIARS > Jesus HOAX

v. 1 Saul, still breathing threats & murder against the disciples of the Lord

Breathing Out = Angry Animal > Even his BREATH is DANGEROUS

STILL Breathing Out Threats, BEGAN in Ch 7 – STEPHEN'S Death

Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Acts 8.3

Verb describes WILD ANIMAL MANGLING its VICTIMS

Deep ROOT of ANGER, BITTERNESS > RIPENED to MURDER

I was once a blasphemer & 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

Religious ANGER Can Be Very Terrifying > Rages in World Today

REASON for ANGER > Hellenists: NEW Challenge to OLD Religion

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.* Deut 21.22-23

Cross Proves Jesus of Nazareth NOT X > CRIMINAL Not KING!

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

2) Frustration > Can't Kill the Message – BLOOD Makes it Spread

...there arose a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem ... Those who had been scattered went about preaching the word Acts 8.1,4

vs. 1,2 went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem

Believers Scattered > Damascus N. 184 m. Light traffic · 3 hr 27 min

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

In my obsession agnst them, I even went to foreign cities 2 persecute them Acts 26.11

Instead of DESTROYING the FAITH -- he DISPERSED the FAITH

Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Acts 6.8

In Stephen PAUL face to face w Articulate, KNOWLEDGEABLE Xtian

Knew Scriptures > BETTER? – Unplanned Message > All OT Pts to X

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

8.26-27 Angel of the Lord to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ... there was an Ethiopian

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... 13.9

2 NAMES from BIRTH > Roman Name PAUL, 'Saul' HEBREW Name

1) Conviction > ANGRY Paul KNOCKED OFF his HIGH HORSE

vs. 4-5 ... voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you, Lord?" he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Call of Jesus: 'Saul, Saul' // God to 'Moses, Moses' 'Samuel, Samuel'

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

NOBLE Example of STEPHEN 1st MARTYR of Jesus –

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. Was his faith as strong as Stephen's?...Did he have a moral character that could ask for forgiveness of his murderers at the moment he was being killed? James Boice

FAMOUS Conversion > UNIQUE: Pharisee, Damascus, Apostle

NOT Model for All: Peter, Timothy, You, Me: KEY Truly Know Jesus

JESUS: 'this is eternal life - to KNOW YOU the only true God, and Jesus Christ the one you sent'
John 17.3

3) Consecrated > 'Set Apart' Made HOLY

v. 7,8 men traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground - eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

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

SAUL: Servant of GOD of LIGHT > BLIND and CONFUSED

vs. 9,11 for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.... behold, 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 X

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

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

v. 17 "...so that you may regain your sight & be filled w the Holy Spirit."

LUKE the MEDICAL DOCTOR writes... v. 18 immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight

4) Calling v 6 " rise & enter the city, & you will be told what you are to do

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

GIVEN ASSIGNMENT > Willingly, Immediately OBEYS

ANGRY BULL > NOW was DOCILE LAMB

v. 7 men who were traveling w him...hearing the voice but seeing no one

Others Heard > OBJECTIVE Event, VERIFIABLE, Not Dream/Vision

NOT SEE Lord Jesus > NOT Called to be APOSTLE

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

vs. 15,16 "he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

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

5) Cancelled v. 19-22 For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

Fire-Breathing, Wild Man – Came to KILL Them – NOW BROTHER

NEW Brother – New FAMILY – NEW ELDER BROTHER – Lord Jesus

New RELATIONSHIPS – With Sisters & Brothers in Christ

HARD to IMAGINE > All the IDEAS Flooding PAUL'S HEAD
 Great Learning > Knowledge of Scripture > Eyes Opened by Jesus
 FIRST SERMON – Only Time Title used in ACTS: SON of GOD
 IMMEDIATELY PROVES > 'I am NOT ASHAMED of the Gospel'

True conversion always issues in church membership. It is not only that converts must join the Christian community, but that the Christian community must welcome converts, especially those from different religious, ethnic, or social background. John Stott

6) 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. Ephesians 3.7

Many RELIGIOUS People > ANGRY if called SINNER

POWER of Paul's Ministry > Life-Long Consciousness: 20 yrs Later

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - *of whom I am the worst.* 1 Tim 1.15

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

2. Timid Man Witnesses

2nd Man in STORY > Demonstrated LOVE to NEWBIE Named Saul

PAUL great HERO > INSPIRES US // ANANIAS - More LIKE US >

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

vs. 10-14 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."

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

PROBABLY TRICK > Fifth Column Infiltration of the Enemy

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

‘I Know God CAN & DOES Save...But PAUL? ...Anyone!!

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

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.

If was NO Responsible Ananias > Then NO Unforgettable Paul

Important thing about MINISTRY is NOT FAME but FAITHFULNESS

Best Praise Not from MAN / God: ‘Well done, Good, Faithful Servant’

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

Humble, Unrecognized, Quiet MINISTRY to Paul > ESSENTIAL

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

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 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

Respected Leader – Ananias: ‘HE’S WITH ME!’ You can TRUST Me

If NO RESPONSIBLE Ananias > Then NO UNFORGETTABLE Paul

October 1857 > Hudson Taylor began Preach X in NINGPO, CHINA

Led Chinese man named Mr. NYI to Faith in Jesus

NYI to Taylor “How long have you known this News in ENGLAND?”

Taylor – w EMBARRASSMENT – ‘For Many CENTURIES!’

NYI “Why didn’t you come Sooner? My Father died looking for Truth”

Over Billion Still WAITING to Hear Good News of Risen Jesus

Lord, in great mercy You called the chief blasphemer and persecutor of your Church into its service. We stand in awe of your irresistible grace. Thank you for making sinners into servants, for giving righteousness to rebels, and forgiveness to foolish ones like us. Open our eyes to your presence in our midst. Lord, have mercy. Turn our hearts from selfish ends and from zealously pursuing our own agenda. Christ, have mercy.

We were once dead through the trespasses and sins in which we lived, but now we are alive together with Christ. Through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father, to whom we humbly confess our sins.

Ask the Lord for Pardoning Forgiveness and Power for Fruitful Service

Almighty God, who caused the light of the gospel to shine throughout the world through the preaching of your servant Paul: grant that we who celebrate his wonderful conversion may also bear witness to your truth. Father, your Son called men and women to leave the past behind them and follow him in the way of the cross. Look with mercy upon our lost and broken world. Speak to all those who yearn to hear the good news of salvation. Grant them to sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel and the right to share the banquet of Your kingdom, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

Acts 9:1-19 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰ Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for

behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” ¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” ¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. ²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” ²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” ²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.