

April 19, 2026
Paul's Conversion

Acts 9:1-19a

1 Meanwhile 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 who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

6 But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.

8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord."

11 The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment 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 in Jerusalem;

14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name."

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel;

16 "I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, 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 his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized,

19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

20 Immediately he preached ^[e]the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

21 Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

²³ Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ²⁴ But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. ²⁵ Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.

²⁶ And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

²⁸ So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.

²⁹ And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.

³⁰ When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

Secondary Text: Matthew 6:24

24“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

The Unexpected Missionary

Paul’s story (he is known as Saul at this point) is one of the most unusual stories told in the New Testament. His conversion on the road to Damascus is a key event in Christian history; it is the beginning of Paul’s missionary life as a Christian.

Without Paul It would be almost impossible to imagine modern Christianity.

If you are confused about the use of the two names, Saul and Paul, let me explain: The name Saul is a common Hebraic version of the Greek name Paul.

Paul was Jewish, born in the Roman city of Tarsus. He was recorded as a citizen of Rome from his birth; this would become important later in Paul’s life.

He was highly educated; trained in Greek Rhetoric; a philosopher. He was also a Rabbinical student who had risen to the highest levels in Jewish society, being selected for the Sanhedrin, the highest court of Hebrew Law.

“Saul”, before his conversion, was also a relentless opponent of Christianity and Christians. He sought them out and imprisoned them, tortured them, often had them stoned as heretics, if they would not repent their love of Christ.

So how is it that this man becomes a devoted follower of Christ himself?

In this story, written by Luke as told by Paul, we see the nature of this conversion.

Imagine everything that you heartily believed to be true; is broken in a way that there is no mistaking this occurrence. Also, you are suddenly blind. This is Saul’s experience.

Jesus takes no chances that Saul is unaware who has done this, he clearly identifies himself, Jesus, as the one who has done this to him.

Note what Christ tells Ananais when he asks him to go to Paul, and cure his blindness: (a very apt aphorism)

But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.”

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Paul will in fact suffer many things in his experiences preaching Christ’s word:

- Paul is stoned and left for dead in Lystra.
- Paul and Silas are beaten and thrown into the inner prison in Philippi.
- Paul is beaten in Jerusalem nearly to death.
- Paul is seized by the Romans in Jerusalem. Paul remains under arrest for the remainder of the book of Acts.
- There’s another attempt to have Paul brought back to Jerusalem as part of an ambush intended to kill him.
- Paul sails onboard a Roman ship, headed for Rome, and his eventual imprisonment there, the ship runs aground. Roman soldiers plan to kill the prisoners from the ship, including Paul, but a Centurion prevents it. Paul, with 275 persons is left ship-wrecked in Malta.
- By order of Emperor Nero, Paul is beheaded in the year 68.

Paul is quite sangfroid about these dangers; he is highly aware of what he has done in the past to other Christians.

Paul missionary work is obviously the most important thing in the early Church, but it is his writing that has molded Christianity from his time to the present day. Paul tackles complex questions and scenarios by giving direct, though sometimes uncomfortable answers to how Christians should respond to conundrums in life and faith.

Though St. Paul was not one of the original 12 Apostles of Jesus, he was one of the most prolific contributors to the New Testament. Of the 27 books in the New Testament, 13 or 14 are traditionally attributed to Paul, though only 7 of these Pauline epistles are accepted as being entirely authentic and dictated by St. Paul himself. The authorship of the others is debated, and they are commonly thought to have

come from contemporary or later followers writing in Paul's name. These authors likely used material from his surviving letters and may have even had access to letters written by him that no longer survive.

Many Biblical scholars believe he may have written others as well, but they were destroyed when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. We know that he journeyed to Egypt at one point, and there are hints that there were letters written during that period, but none remain.

Perhaps the most important of these Books of the Bible Paul wrote, was the Book of Romans. Romans is a tour de force identifying how to conceive Christian theology. Martin Luther described Romans as the most important book in the New Testament, and certainly it was the foundation of Luther's Reformation movement.

Still Paul knew that he was only a servant of Christ. In 1st Corinthians he deals with confusion within the early church, and the focus on preachers rather than Christ:

For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

Is Christ divided?

Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,

And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age?

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

For since, ... in the wisdom of God..., the world through its wisdom, did not know God, it pleased God that even though the foolishness of the message preached, some were still saved who believed.

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the

wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Our Bible Study since its inception has made Paul a focus of our study. We started by studying 1st Corinthians, and then Romans. There was a reason for this direction; Corinthians helps us to understand the complexities and problems of the early Christian church, and Romans outlines the most important theological dissertation of the 1st Century church, though it is couched in the framework of a letter

Are there some concerns amongst theologians regarding Paul?

Yes, some have gone so far as to suggest that Paul “created” a church that is different from the one that Christ preached.

Most of those theologians seem to feel that Christ would have wanted simply a slight variation from Judaic law as was known then. They suggest that Paul emphasized the death and Resurrection of Christ as central to God’s forgiveness and that this was contrary to Christ announcing that forgiveness was simply based on faith alone, **before** his death and Resurrection.

To me as a 21st Century Christian, this appears to be almost esoteric thinking. There is agreement that Christ has given us a new covenant; one based on our faith in God, and our receipt of unearned forgiveness.

For 1st Century Christians this message was muddled a bit by different takes on the meaning of Christ’s new Covenant. We need to remember that most of the Gospels weren’t written until after Paul had died. The Canonical Gospels were written between 66 and 110 AD. There are verifiable copies of letters by Paul that are older than the Canonical Gospels. It is important to remember that notes were used from those Disciples who could write, and from oral histories. Many of the Disciples, however, couldn’t read or write.

Thus, the early church was very diverse in its theological views and understanding of Christ’s message. Paul was by far the most educated and literate of writers of Christianity during this period.

All agree that it was Paul who conceived that Christ had made salvation and our relationship with God available to everyone, and not simply the Jews.

Our relationship is not based on the Jewish Laws, though we should attend to those of the Commandments. The result of this opening up the church to all, is the reason that Christianity grew to be such a large religion across the world with its message of love and forgiveness of sins.

Theologian Bart Ehrman asserts that were it not for Paul the church would have become little more than another sect of Judaism, much like the Essenes.

It is the door that Christ opened through his mission to his disciples, Paul and others, that made Christianity grow so rapidly, and so widely throughout the world; from the distant shores of Ireland to the forests and mountains of India, from the frozen reaches of Northern Europe to the deserts of Ethiopia, all within a period of less than 2 Centuries.

Let us Pray:

Heavenly Father,

In Your infinite wisdom, You have crafted a world rich in complexity and beauty. Today, I stand before You, seeking the grace to navigate the intricacies of the ideas that unfold around me. Grant me the humility to know my limitations and the courage to venture beyond them, under Your guiding light.

Please, Lord, pour Your understanding into my heart—like rain nourishing parched earth—so that ideas, no matter how complex, become seeds of knowledge that grow within me. Help me to see through the fog of confusion, to connect dots hidden in plain sight. Like Solomon, who sought wisdom above all, let me cherish the pursuit of understanding, knowing that it leads me closer to Your divine truth.

In encountering challenges, may I find opportunities to strengthen my faith and broaden my horizons. Let me remember that, with You, nothing is insurmountable—not even the most bewildering of concepts. Through Your grace, enable me to digest these ideas, to use them for good, and to share the fruits of this understanding with others.

Amen.