

PART 13: FROM TERRORIST TO EVANGELIST

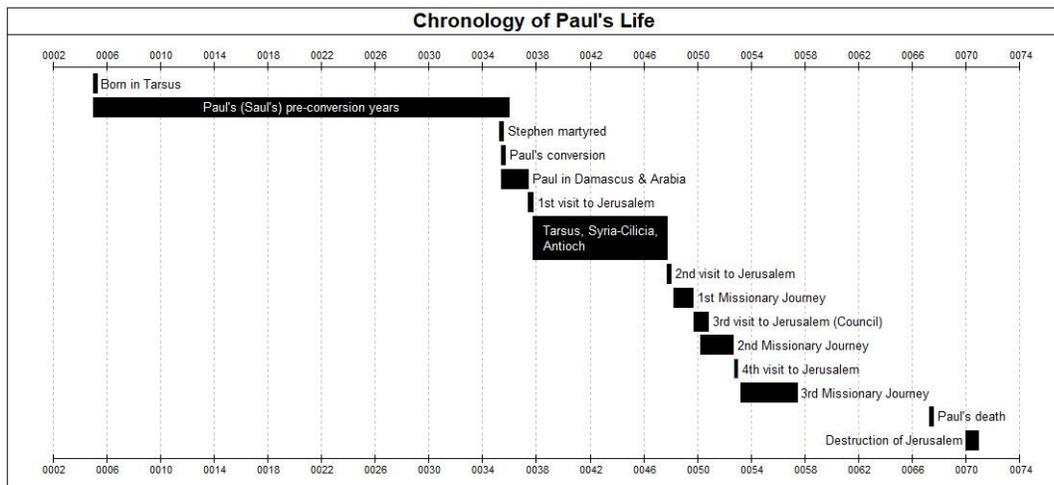
ACTS 9:1-31

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MAIN IDEA

This passage describes the most famous conversion in church history: Saul of Tarsus (later called Paul). By God's generous grace, Saul went from being a terrorist to one of the world's greatest evangelists.



Source: ESV Study Bible Online <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/chart_44_06/>

I. SAUL'S EPIC TRANSFORMATION (9:1-19A)

A. THE RISEN JESUS CONFRONTS SAUL (9:1-9).

- "The Way" is a term describing followers of Jesus who described himself as "the way"¹ (John 14:6).
- Damascus: an ancient capital city of Syria. Many Jews fled to this city from Jerusalem after Stephen's murder.
- Jesus confronts Saul and asks, *why are you persecuting me?* This statement shows the inseparable union that exists between Christ and his followers.

B. THE RISEN JESUS COMMISSIONS SAUL (9:10-19A).

- Ananias²: One of the leaders of the Damascus church, and therefore, of Saul's targets (cf. 22:12)

¹ The Essene sect at Qumran also called itself "the way" believing that its stoic practices were the way to righteousness (Keener 347).

² Ananias, not to be confused with the Ananias in Acts 5.

- Tarsus was the birthplace of Saul (also called Paul³) and was both a commercial and educational center.
- "Chosen instrument" indicates God's election of this man to convey his grace to all people. Paul used this same term four times (Rom. 9:21, 23; 2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:21).
- Paul began his ministry preaching to the Jews, but his primary calling was to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; 15:16).
- Laying on of hands in the OT took place when offerers of sacrifices laid their hands on the animal as an expression of identification. But in the symbolic sense in Acts, it signifies the affirmation, support, and identification with someone and his ministry.

II. SAUL'S EARLY TRIALS (9:19B -31)

A. IN DAMASCUS: CONSPIRACY AGAINST SAUL (9:19B-25)

- "After many days had passed" refers to a period of three years, in which Paul ministered in Nabatean Arabia, an area encompassing Damascus south to the Sinai peninsula.
- Gates: Damascus was a walled city; thus, the gates were the only conventional means of escape.

B. IN JERUSALEM: SUSPICIONS ABOUT SAUL (9:26-30)

- Barnabas was a member of the priestly tribe of the Levites and a native of the island of Cyprus. He became an associate of Paul and a prominent figure later in Acts (chapters 13-15).
- Hellenistic Jews were Greek-speaking Jews.
- Caesarea was an important port city on the Mediterranean Sea and a large Roman garrison headquarters. Afterward, Paul disappeared from prominent ministry for several years, although he possibly founded some churches around Syria and Cilicia (15:23; Gal. 1:21).

C. PEACE IN THE MIDST OF TRIAL (9:31)

- Peace came to the churches in Judea and Samaria after the conversion of its prime persecutor (ESV Crossway Bibles 2101, note).

³ Paul (Gr. *Paúlos*, from Latin *Paulis*, meaning *little*). As a Roman citizen he doubtless used both Saul (Hebrew) and Paul (Greek) which was a common practice among Jews of the dispersion. (Tenney 627)

III. APPLICATION: UNDERSTANDING GOD'S CALL

Remember: Just as God called Paul to be an amazing evangelist, as a believer he has also called you!

A. YOU ARE CALLED INTO GOD'S _____.⁴

"But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Pet. 2:9 NLT)

B. YOU ARE CALLED INTO _____.

"God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. 1:9 NIV)

C. YOU ARE CALLED TO SHARE IN _____.

"In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. " (1 Pet. 5:10 NLT)

⁴ "Wonderful ight" refers to divine illumination and understanding.

IV. ADDENDUM: THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL⁵

A. WHAT IS AN APOSTLE?

- The title Apostle is from the Greek *Apostolos*, meaning *one who is sent as a messenger*.
- Paul was not one of the 12 Apostles.
- Paul called himself an *Apostle to the Gentiles*, extending the title beyond the 12 Apostles.
- Paul was a pioneering missionary and church planter.

B. PAUL'S PRE-CONVERSION BACKGROUND

- He was born in about AD 5 in Tarsus in southeastern Turkey then known as Celicia.
- Paul was a contemporary of Jesus and had seen him but was not a follower during his earthly ministry.
- Paul came from a Jewish family (the tribe of Benjamin) and is known by his Jewish name of Saul.
- He later went by his Roman name of Paul.
- His family appears to have been wealthy and prominent in Tarsus
- His father was a tentmaker, as was Paul.
- Paul was a Roman citizen purchased or earned by his family (like military service—made army tents?).
- They were part of the Jewish diaspora—cultural identification issues are magnified.
- Paul was sent to Jerusalem to study under the renowned Jewish teacher Gamaliel.
- Paul was apparently unmarried when writing his letters.
- Paul excelled in his studies and became a Pharisee as was his father.
- He and other Pharisees saw Christianity and Christians as a threat to Judaism
- Paul was authorized to track down Christians and bring them before the Sanhedrin court.

⁵ The Life of Paul; RW Research