

The Conversion and Baptism of Paul

(appropriate for Mid Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily, March 2015

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Paul's conversion is recorded in three places in the Bible. All three are in the Book of Acts (Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26).

First let's look at what Paul was like before he became a Christian.

Acts 7:58-60

When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.⁵⁹ They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"⁶⁰ Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

Paul watched everyone's coats while they killed Stephen.

Acts 8:1-3

Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. **2 Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.**

Paul hunted down Christians, kicked down the doors of their houses, and dragged them off to prison.

Acts 9:1-2

Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, **2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.**

Paul's intent and desire was to kill the Christians. He was able to get the support of the local government to hunt down Christians and bring them to the authorities like a bounty hunter would.

Acts 22:4-5

I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, **5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.**

Acts 22:19-20

And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. **20 And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.'**

Not only did Paul hunt down Christians and capture them but he also personally hit and beat them.

Acts 26:10-11

And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. **11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.**

When it came time to decide what would happen to the Christians Paul had captured, his vote was that they be killed. He also tried to force them to blaspheme. What does that mean? What was Paul trying to make them do? He was trying to get them to deny, reject, and turn away from Christ. If you reject Christ I'll let you go, otherwise I'll make sure you die!" He was so enraged at Christians that he even chased them into other countries to get them.

(Galatians 1:11-14)

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

What kind of person (before his conversion) would Paul be like in today's world? What people do you know who are hunting down Christians, beating them, trying to get them to blaspheme, and killing them?

Paul sounds kind of like ISIS. He was a religious terrorist. He went from being this person to becoming an Apostle of Christ and the person who wrote most of the New Testament. That is a very dramatic change isn't it?

I Corinthians 15:9-10

For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Let's look at what happened to Paul.

Acts 9:3-9

As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and 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 get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."7 The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Acts 22:6-11

"But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me,7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' 8 And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' 9 And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. 10 And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.' 11 But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.

Acts 26:12-15

"While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

Atheists like to point out that these three accounts of Paul's conversion are different from each other and therefore they "conflict" with one another so they could not have been written by a perfect God. But they are looking at it the wrong way. Anytime there are multiple accounts recorded in the Bible of the same event the accounts are not contradictory, they are complimentary. Each account provides information to add to our understanding of the event.

In Acts 9:7 it says that the men who were with Paul heard a voice but did not see anyone. In Acts 22:9 it says that the men who were with Paul saw a light but were not blinded like Paul was and that they did not understand what the voice said. Acts 26:13 says that the light they all saw was brighter than the sun.

So, there is no conflict in these verses. The men travelling with Paul heard a voice but did not understand what it was saying and they saw the light but it did not blind them. It almost sounds like the event was extremely close to Paul and farther away from those he travelled with. It does not appear that either Paul or his companions actually saw Jesus.

Next, Paul is visited by a Christian named Ananias.

Acts 9:10-18

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." 11 And the Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for 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 harm he did 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 bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

What would you do if you found yourself in front of the commander of ISIS? Would you run around in circles screaming? What would you do? You should share the gospel with him. Perhaps he will become a Christian like Paul did. Always remember, no one is beyond the power of the gospel.

What is the first thing Paul did after he became a Christian and regained his sight? He got baptized. Remember that. We will talk more about baptism later. Then what did he do?

Acts 9:19-20

and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

After he was baptized he ate and after just a few days he started sharing the gospel with people. It did not take him very long did it?

OK, now let's turn to Hebrews 6:4-6

Hebrews 6:4-6

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit,⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,⁶ and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

This passage refers to non-Christians who have been immersed in the study of God's Word or in fellowship with Christians perhaps for many years. For whatever reason they find it attractive but have never received Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. The Greek word for partakers is "metochous" which means to be associated with or to go along with. The Holy Spirit, using the Living and Active Word of God works on all men convicting them of sin, righteousness, and judgment (**John 16:8**) so even non-Christians who spend time around Christians and the study of God's Word have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit (If God had used the terms "sealed with" or "indwelt by" the Holy Spirit the reference would be of Christians, but those are not the terms used). They have also observed the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Christians they have been immersed in fellowship with. Eventually, these people will either become Christians or will intentionally decide against Christ. If they decide to reject Christ it is impossible to renew them to repentance since they have seen all there is to see and it was not enough. They rejected Christ even though they had an intimate, insider's view of everything. Note that the words used in this passage (enlightened, tasted, partake) are words demonstrating a weak association – these people are observers and social participants, but not Christians.

(II Peter 2:20-21)

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. ²¹ For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

Some of you have been involved in church activities since you were in pre-school. You have memorized verses, heard hundreds of sermons, studied the Bible, and been involved in Christian ministry. Even so, some of you have never actually made a personal commitment to follow Christ and give your life to Him.

This is a dangerous situation. One of three things will eventually result:

- 1) You will continue to drift along out of habit and die in your sins, separated from Christ for eternity
- 2) You will, at some point, commit your life to Christ as Savior and Lord before you die
- 3) You will, at some point, decide that you don't believe any of this, reject Christ, and go another way

Let's talk about numbers 1 and 2.

Perhaps you don't know which situation you are in. Our hearts can easily deceive us (**Jeremiah 17:9**) so it's not always easy to know for sure if you have given your life to Christ. Perhaps you engage in Christian activities out of habit. Perhaps you prayed to receive Christ but the memory is a little fuzzy and you were young and you are just not sure.

If you are in this situation what should you do?

II Corinthians 13:5-6

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? ⁶ But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test.

(II Corinthians 2:9)

For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

We can test ourselves to see if we are in the faith. How? By doing something out of obedience to Christ that cannot be done out of routine or habit. You have to go out of your way. Let's look again at Paul's conversion.

Acts 22:12-16

"A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, ¹³ came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. ¹⁴ And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. ¹⁵ For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

We are saved by faith calling on the name of Jesus, not by baptism. But baptism is a good test to see if we are in the faith. Why? Because baptism is easy enough that any new Christian can do it, but its hard enough that most non-christians won't. You can use baptism to test yourself to see what is in your heart.

If you have not been baptized why not? Why do you delay?

If you are a real Christian you will find a way to get yourself baptized. If not you won't bother with it.

Perhaps you are not sure if you are a Christian and you were baptized when you were younger but you are not sure why you did it. Perhaps you wanted to please your parents or get something that was being offered to those who got baptized.

Now that you are more mature and free from these other motivations its OK to ask to be baptized again. Just explain the situation to your pastor.

You getting baptized is an encouragement to others, but its primary purpose is to demonstrate to yourself that you have made a real commitment to following Christ.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *The Conversion and Baptism of Paul*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Acts 7:51-60*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Acts 8:1-4*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Acts 9:1-31*

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PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Acts 26:1-32*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Galatians 1:11-14, I Corinthians 15:9-10*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

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JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *The Conversion and Baptism of Paul*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Hebrews 6:4-6, II Peter 2:20-21*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Corinthians 13:5-6, II Corinthians 2:9*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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