
THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20

Fundamental to the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

- a. If Christ was not raised, our faith is in vain - cf. **1 Co 15:14,17**
 - b. If Christ was not raised, the apostles were liars - cf. **1 Co 15:15**
2. One evidence for the resurrection is the transformation that took place in the lives of those who knew Jesus...
- a. Even a Orthodox Jewish scholar admitted as much
 - b. “If the disciples were totally disappointed and on the verge of desperate flight because of the very real reason of the crucifixion, it took another very real reason in order to transform them from a band of disheartened and dejected Jews into the most self-confident missionary society in world history.” - **Pinchas Lapid**, former Chairman of the Applied Linguistics Department
 - c. He concluded that a bodily resurrection could possibly have been that reason!
3. An amazing transformation that took place was that in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus...
- a. A devout Pharisee, persecutor of Christians
 - b. Who became Paul the apostle, persecuted by his Jewish brethren

[In this lesson we shall consider why Saul’s conversion serves as strong evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Let’s begin by reading **Ga 1:13-14**, and noticing...]

I. SAUL’S FORMER MANNER OF LIFE

A. HE PERSECUTED THE CHURCH...

1. In Jerusalem - **Ac 8:1-3**

2. And beyond - **Ac 9:1-2**

-- **Something he believed he ought to do - Ac 26:9-11**

B. HE WAS ADVANCING IN JUDAISM... (Evangelism through the sword VS Evangelism through Holy Spirit) **ISIS VS Holy Spirit**

1. As a scholar, trained at the feet of Gamaliel - **Ac 22:3; cf. 5:34**

2. In social standing, advancing beyond many of his contemporaries

a. Holding positions of religious power - cf. **Ac 26:12**

b. Which likely included access to financial power

On the “fast tract” of success among his peers!

C. HE WAS ZEALOUS FOR HIS TRADITIONS...

1. Proud to be a Hebrew - **Ph 3:4-5**

2. Proud to be a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee - cf. **Ac 23:6**

a. A conservative sect of the Jews

b. Noted for their opposition to Jesus during His ministry -
e.g., **Mt 12:14**

With such a religious background, he was naturally prejudiced - Ac 26:9

[Yet this prejudiced, prominent Pharisee, fierce in his opposition to Jesus and His church, became one of the most influential Christians of all time. How did this happen? Let's examine several...]

II. EXPLANATIONS FOR SAUL'S CONVERSION

A. PERHAPS THERE WAS AN ULTERIOR MOTIVE...

1. Could it have been wealth?

a. He had that with the Jews

b. He left it for the poverty of following Christ - cf. **1 Co 4:11-12; Ac 20:33-34**

2. Could it have been fame?

a. He had that with the Jews

- b. Consider what he experienced as a Christian - cf. **1 Co 4:10,13**
 - 1) Regarded as foolish and weak, even by other Christians
 - 2) Viewed as the filth of the world by those in the world
- 3. Could it have been power?
 - a. He had this with the Jews
 - b. Compare this with what he suffered as a Christian - cf. **2 Co 11:24-28**

Indeed, no ulterior motive can be found to explain Saul's conversion

B. PERHAPS HE WAS DECEIVED...

- 1. Then who deceived him?
 - a. Friends would not, for he was their champion against the Christians
 - b. Christians could not, because of his persecution against them
 - 1) Putting them into prison, chasing them into other towns - **Ac 8:3; 9:1-2**
 - 2) Even after his conversion, many feared him - cf. **Ac 9:26**
- 2. His testimony does not allow for the possibility of deception
 - a. He claimed to receive his gospel from Jesus, not man - **Ga 1:11-12**
 - b. He claimed to see Jesus raised from the dead - **1 Co 15:8**

The empirical nature of his testimony prevents the possibility of deception

C. PERHAPS HE WAS MAD

- 1. Such was the conclusion of Festus, the governor - **Ac 26:24**
- 2. Others have tried to explain his conversion in psychological terms
 - a. That his intense persecution of Christians gave him a guilt-ridden conscience
 - b. That combined with the heat on the road to Damascus, he became delirious and only thought he saw Jesus!
- 3. Yet consider the testimony of Saul (Paul)
 - a. He had a clear conscience regarding persecuting the Christians - **Ac 23:1**
 - 1) It was something he thought he should do - **Ac 26:9**

- 2) He did it out of ignorance, for which he knew he received mercy - **1 Tim 1:13**
- b. He said he saw Jesus more than once
 - 1) Not just on the road to Damascus
 - 2) But on other occasions as well – **Ac 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 2 Co 12:8-9**

Read his epistles, do they seem like letters written by a mad man?

D. THE ONLY PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION: HE SAW JESUS...!

- 1. This is the explanation given by Paul (Saul) himself
 - a. Before the Jerusalem mob - **Ac 22:1-16**
 - b. Before King Agrippa and Festus the governor - cf. **Ac 26:12-23**
- 2. It is the only explanation that explains his conversion
 - a. Why he was willing to forego wealth, fame, and power
 - b. Why he was willing to suffer poverty, shame, and persecution -- **As he said “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision...” - Ac 26:19**

CONCLUSION

- 1. The conversion of Saul is best explained by...
 - a. His testimony that it was the resurrected Jesus who appeared to him
 - b. Not once, but continuously throughout the rest of his life

Serving as one of the greatest evidences for the resurrection of Jesus!

- 2. What is the significance of the resurrection of Jesus?
 - a. For the **unbeliever**, it verifies...
 - 1) The fact of His deity - cf. **Ro 1:4**
 - 2) The fact of final judgment - cf. **Ac 17:30-31**
 - b. For the **believer**, it verifies...
 - 1) The adequacy of our justification (Jesus’ blood does cover our sins) - cf. **Ro 4:25**

2) The hope for our own resurrection - cf. **1 Co 15:20-22**

Through such evidence as the conversion of Saul, God has born witness to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Have you responded to this evidence with the obedience of faith?