

Becoming a Christian

Acts 9:1-22

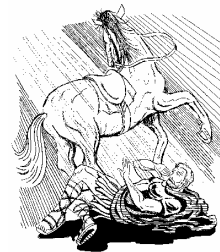


Background

- ❑ Not long after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity spread rapidly (*Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:7*). However, many were strongly opposed to the Christian faith. After Stephen gave his speech concerning Christ, he was dragged out of the city and stoned (*7:1-58a*).
 - 📖 “Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”¹ They killed Stephen. “And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.” (*7:58b-8:1a*)
 - 📖 As godly men buried Stephen and mourned, “Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison” (*8:3, NIV*).
 - ❑ Though Saul was violently opposed to Christianity, he considered himself to be a good man.
 - 📖 He thought, “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” (*Philippians 3:4b-6, NIV*)²
1. Why do you think Saul was so opposed to Christianity?³

Bright Light

- ❑ Christians continued to preach the good news of Jesus (*8:4, 25, 40*), and Saul continued to oppose them. But something happened to Saul. Read Acts 9:1-22.
2. On his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, Saul was met by a bright light.⁴ It was Jesus Christ. Jesus said to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (*9:4*). What is interesting or surprising about Jesus’ words?⁵



- ❑ Saul immediately changed his attitude toward Jesus. He realized that Jesus was not an imposter cursed by God. He is Lord! Saul asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” (*22:10*).⁶ Saul obeyed Jesus’ instructions to go into Damascus (*22:10-11*). And after some hesitation (*9:13-14*), Ananias obeyed Jesus’ instructions to minister to Saul (*9:17-19*).

¹ Saul was also called Paul (*Acts 13:9*). Saul was his Hebrew name, and means “asked for.” Paul (*Gr. Paulos*) was his Roman name, and means “little.” Paul was born in Tarsus and was a Roman citizen (*13:37; 21:39*). He was trained by the famous rabbi Gamaliel (*22:3*) and was a member of the Jewish Pharisee party (*23:6*).

² These words expressed his pre-Christian confidence in his inherited privileges and personal achievements. After he became a Christian, he considered these things to be “garbage” compared to knowing Christ (*Phil. 3:7-8*).

³ Of course, there is still great opposition to Christianity today. States or groups may oppose Christianity because they feel it threatens their authority, order, culture, religion, etc. Individuals may oppose Christianity because they feel it threatens their autonomy (self-government as opposed to submission to God), moral freedom, status, etc.

⁴ He later says, “I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions” (*26:13*).

⁵ While Saul thought he was persecuting only those “who belonged to the Way” (*9:2*), he was also persecuting the Way, the Truth and the Life Himself! (*John 14:6*). The church is the body of Christ (*1 Corinthians 12:27*).

⁶ This quotation is from Paul’s retelling of the story in *Acts 22:3-16*. He told the story again in *Acts 26:4-18*.

Big Change

□ After Saul regained his sight, he was baptized (9:18). After he regained his strength, “he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God” (9:19-20). All were astonished at his big change (9:21). This man, who had violently opposed Christianity, now “baffled (confused) the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ” (9:22).

3. Certainly, Saul’s conversion was dramatic. Some non-Christians might think, “If Jesus Christ appeared to *me* like that, I would become a Christian too!” Should non-Christians wait for a “bright light” before they believe in Jesus Christ? Explain.⁷

📖 Saul later said that God wants us to “seek him and perhaps reach out to him and find him” (Acts 17:27).⁸

4. While Saul’s experience was unique, what parts of his experience are common (or at least *should* be common) to all genuine Christian conversions?⁹

5. Read Acts 9:16. What would Saul’s “big change” involve, and why?¹⁰



Because Why?

□ Why did this happen to Saul? Because God had plans for him! Jesus told Ananias, “[Saul] is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (9:15).¹¹

6. God called Saul to a special position and assignment. Certainly, Saul’s calling was unique. As Christians today, why were *we* called?¹²

📖 “God...has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.” (2 Timothy 1:9, NIV)

📖 “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1, NIV).

Reflection/Application

➤ If you have not met Jesus Christ, humbly and sincerely seek to meet him. If you have already become a Christian, are you living a life worthy of your calling? Read and heed footnote 12.

⁷ Though many Christians have had “dramatic” experiences, the majority have not. Nevertheless, every genuine conversion is an amazing, miraculous reality.

⁸ Actually, we only “find” God as He reveals Himself to us. However, we are responsible for our attitudes toward God. If we are not humble and sincere seekers of truth, we should not expect the Truth to reveal Himself to us.

⁹ Becoming a Christian means entering into a relationship with Christ. Each person must “meet” Christ in some way.

¹⁰ By changing sides, the persecutor would become the persecuted. The man who caused Christians to suffer would now suffer for the cause of Christ. Saul would now share in the sufferings of Christ (Romans 8:17).

¹¹ “carry my name” – proclaim the good news of Jesus; bear witness of Christ; “Gentiles” – non-Jews

¹² Though the New Testament sometimes uses the word “call” to mean a call to a specific job or task (e.g., Rom. 1:1; Acts 13:2), “call” is usually used in a more general sense. Paul typically uses the word to describe God’s gracious work in effectively bringing a person to faith and salvation. In this sense, every true Christian has been called into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). And every Christian has been called “according to God’s purpose” (Rom. 8:28). While God has plans for each Christian, our first concern should be our general calling, that is, the “call to a holy life” (1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thes. 4:7; 2 Tim. 1:9). As Paul said, “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Read Ephesians 4:1-6:20 to see what kind of life this is. We may not be called to be a great missionary and church leader, but God has called each Christian for a purpose, and we should take that seriously.