

From Myth to Savior  
by Doug Hamilton

Step Five) The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

History does not doubt the existence of the early church leader named the Apostle Paul. Many of the writings (likely fourteen) we have in the New Testament were written by his own hand or spoken by his own mouth. Christians of the first century were even willing to die in defense of this man's contribution to their Holy Scriptures from God. Things were not always like this concerning this man.

Luke's historical account states that Paul was a persecutor of Christians.

- He orchestrated the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58).
- He laid waste to the church by dragging them to prison (Acts 8:1-3).
- He was slaughtering Christians (Acts 9:1-2).
- He persecuted them to death (Acts 22:4).
- He was a Jewish as one could be.
  - Philippians 3:5-6 "...circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."
- He was well connected in the Christian-hating capital of Jerusalem, educated under the finest teacher of the Law, hired by the Jewish Supreme Court to hunt down Christians and actually felt he was doing a favor to God for doing it.
- He was in every sense of the word an unconvertible radical. This was the argument he made for the Galatians who called his apostleship into question.
  - Galatians 1:13-14 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; <sup>14</sup> and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

Something radical happened that reversed the roles for him. He went from being the persecutor of Christians to being persecuted for Christianity.

- Acts 9:22-23 "But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ. <sup>23</sup> When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him..."
- Acts 14:19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.
- Acts 16:23-24 When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; <sup>24</sup> and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.
- Acts 22:22 They listened to him up to this statement, and *then* they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!"

How did such an extreme change in ideology occur in such a radical? Who could have reached a man like him with the gospel of Christ?

- Some have proposed that Paul had a nervous breakdown from the stress of his hateful guilt, leading him to reverse his thoughts on Christianity. This is as logical as believing that the leader of Al-Qaida could have a nervous breakdown and end up being the leader of a Christian movement. It is simply something that does not happen in our world.

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- Still others have proposed that he suffered a heat stroke on the Road to Damascus and it resulted in his conversion. This makes no sense at all, for what stroke in human medical history can account for a change in theology, behavior and remarkable outcomes such as these?
- Others have proposed that one of the Christians were able to reach out to Saul with the gospel of Christ, but we must ask WHO??? All the Christians were terrified of him. The apostles did not even want anything to do with such a zealot against Christianity.
  - 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. <sup>2</sup> *Some* devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.
- Christians were fleeing this man, not flocking to him. Who in their proper Christian mind would have ever reached out to him with the message of Christ?

Luke's historical account records that Saul had a conversion on the road to Damascus.

- Acts 9:1-6 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; <sup>4</sup> and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He *said*, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, <sup>6</sup> but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."
- Acts 9:18 "And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized..."
- Acts 22:15-16 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> 'Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'
- According to Luke's investigative reporting, the persecutor of Christians was introduced to the gospel of Christ, not by the actions of Christians or the apostles, but from Christ Himself. This was the exact argument he made in *Galatians 1:11-12 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

**Simple Summary of the Facts:** What could have made such a change in Saul's life concerning this conversion? There was not a single person that would have been able to reach Saul with the gospel for they were all fleeing for their lives from him. Luke records that Jesus reached him for conversion. From a persecutor to the persecuted, Paul's life is truly one of a radical change in history, for he was confronted by the Jesus.

Tough Question: How does a real person of history named Jesus, someone Whom we know as being murdered on a cross and buried in a tomb, reach out to a person like Paul? The only way I can deduce such a scenario is that Jesus had to be raised from the grave to make it so, for dead

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men evangelize nobody, but a resurrected Savior can. The radical change in the life of an untouchable radical is certainly a good evidence of a resurrected Jesus.

### Overall Summary:

- According to the historically reliable writings of Luke, we can see that Jesus claimed that He would be killed, buried, resurrected, appear to the apostles and others following the resurrection.
- The apostles started spreading the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the people who were in and around Jerusalem at the time of the actual event. Within days of the ascension, thousands upon thousands of Jews converted against peer pressure and even threats of beatings and imprisonments. They must have been convicted of what they knew to be true.
- Saul of Tarsus would have been the hardest person on the earth to convert to Christianity. Luke confirmed that he was a persecutor of the church and a radical hater of Christians. Yet something happened on the Road to Damascus that changed his life and made him a prolific missionary and writer in the name of Christ.
- Luke 24:6 “He is not here, but He has risen.”