



Season of Epiphany

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE

ANTE-COMMUNION

Saint Stephen's welcomes everyone who wishes to follow Christ, worship together, grow in faith and share God's love through service to others.



The [conversion of Paul the Apostle](#) (also the [Pauline conversion](#), [Damascene conversion](#), [Damascus Christophany](#) and the "road to Damascus" event) was, according to the [New Testament](#), an event in the life of Saul/[Paul the Apostle](#) that led him to cease persecuting [early Christians](#) and to become a follower of [Jesus](#).

The New Testament accounts

Paul's conversion experience is discussed in both the [Pauline epistles](#) and in the [Acts of the Apostles](#). According to both sources, Saul/Paul was not a follower of Jesus and did not know him before his [crucifixion](#). The narrative of the Book of Acts suggests Paul's conversion occurred 4–7 years after the crucifixion of Jesus.^{[\[1\]](#)^{[\[2\]](#)}^{[\[3\]](#)} The accounts of Paul's conversion experience describe it as miraculous, supernatural, or otherwise revelatory in nature.}

Before conversion

Before his conversion, Paul was known as

Wednesday, 25 Jan 2023 9:30am

Welcome and Announcements

Salutation:

Leader: Blessed be our God.

People: For ever and ever. Amen.

Priest: Let us pray the Collect for Purity together:

All: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your Holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Gloria

Canticle 13

Hymnal 1982 #S236

Glory to you, Lord God of our fathers; *

you are worthy of praise; glory to you.

Glory to you for the radiance of your holy Name; *

we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

Glory to you in the splendor of your temple; *

on the throne of your majesty, glory to you.

Glory to you, seated between the Cherubim; *

we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

Glory to you, beholding the depths; *

in the high vault of heaven, glory to you.

Glory to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; *

we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

Presider: The Lord be with you

People: And also with you.

Presider: Let us pray

Collect for the day:

O God, by the preaching of your apostle Paul you have caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world: Grant, we pray, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may show ourselves thankful to you by following his holy teaching; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Readings: *(Please be seated)*

First Reading: A reading from the book Acts (26:9-21):

Paul said to King Agrippa, "Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

"With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.' I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The Lord answered, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles-- to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

"After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me."

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Psalm 67 *(Read aloud in unison)*

1 May God be merciful to us and bless us, *

show us the light of his countenance and come to us.

2 Let your ways be known upon earth, *

your saving health among all nations.

3 Let the peoples praise you, O God; *

let all the peoples praise you.

- 4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, *
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide all the nations upon earth.**
- 5 Let the peoples praise you, O God; *
let all the peoples praise you.**
- 6 The earth has brought forth her increase; *
may God, our own God, give us his blessing.**
- 7 May God give us his blessing, *
and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe of him.**

Second Reading: A Reading from (Galatians 1:11-24):

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother. In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, "The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God because of me.

Reader: The Word of the Lord

People: Thanks be to God

Gospel Reading: Matthew (16:13-19)

Reader: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

People: Glory to you, Lord Christ.

Jesus said to the twelve, "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them,

for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

Reader The Gospel of the Lord
People Praise to you, Lord Christ.

Reflection on the readings *(optional)*

CONTEMPORARY NICENE CREED: *(please stand as you are able)*

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen

Prayers of the People:

Leader: Let us name before God those for whom we offer our prayers. God the Father, your will for all people is health and salvation.

People: We praise and thank you, O Lord.

Leader: God the Son, you came that we might have life and have it more abundantly

People: We praise you and thank you, O Lord.

Leader: God the Holy Spirit, you inhabit our bodies as a temple of your presence.

People: We praise you and thank you, O Lord.

Leader: Grant to all who seek your guidance, and to all who are lonely, anxious, or despondent, a knowledge of your will and an awareness of your presence.

People: Hear us, Lord.

Leader: Grant your healing grace to all who are sick, injured, or disabled that they may be made whole.

People: Hear us, Lord.

Leader: Mend broken relationships, and restore those in emotional distress to soundness of mind and serenity of spirit.

People: Hear us, Lord.

Leader: Return to wholeness whatever is broken by human sin in our lives, in our nation, and in our world.

People: Hear us, Lord.

Leader: Bless all who attend to the suffering and needy, granting them wisdom, skill, sympathy, and patience.

People: Hear us, Lord.

Leader: Give to the dying peace and a holy death and uphold by your grace and consolation those who are bereaved.

People: Hear us Lord

Leader: In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer pray for *The Diocese of Panyana – The Province of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan*

People: May God bless and keep them.

Leader: In the Diocesan cycle of prayer we pray for *St. John the Baptist, in Glendale.*

People: May God bless and keep them.

Leader: We pray for the first peoples of this land, especially the Apache and Tahona Odum peoples who called this area home.

People: May God bless and keep them.

Presider: Lord our God, accept the sincere prayers of your people, in the multitude of your mercies, look with compassion upon us and all who turn to you for help, for you are gracious O lover of souls, and to you we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.

The Peace:

Presider: May the peace of the Lord be always with you!

People: And Also with you.

(The people exchange greetings of peace)

CONTEMPORARY LORD'S PRAYER:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven, Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Benediction:

Presider: *The Wisdom of God the Love of God and the Grace of God strengthen you to be Christ's hands and heart in this world, in the name of the Holy Trinity. Amen.*

Dismissal:

Deacon: People of St. Stephen's, what does God call us to do?

People: We are called to love and serve.

Deacon: Let us go forth in the power of God's Spirit, Alleluia, alleluia!

People: Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Saul and was "a Pharisee of [Pharisees](#)", who "[intensely persecuted](#)" the followers of Jesus. Paul describes his life before conversion in his [Epistle to the Galatians](#):

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

— *Galatians 1:13–14*, [NIV](#)^[4]

Paul also discusses his pre-conversion life in his [Epistle to the Philippians](#), 3:4–6,^[5] and his participation in the [stoning of Stephen](#) is described in Acts 7:57–8:3.^[6][\[citation needed\]](#)

Pauline epistles

In the Pauline epistles, the description of Paul's conversion experience is brief. The [First Epistle to the Corinthians](#) 9:1^[7] and 15:3–8^[8] describes Paul as [having seen the risen Christ](#):

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

— *1 Corinthians 15:3–8*, [NIV](#)^[9]

The [Second Epistle to the Corinthians](#) also describes Paul's experience of revelation. In verse 1 the NIV translation mentions "revelations from the Lord", but other translations, including the NRSV, translate that phrase as "revelations of the Lord". The passage begins with Paul seeming to speak about another person, but very quickly he makes it clear he is speaking of himself.

It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.

— *2 Corinthians 12:1-7*, [NRSV](#)^[10]

The [Epistle to the Galatians chapter 1](#) also describes his conversion as a divine [revelation](#), with

Jesus appearing to Paul.

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. [...] But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.

— *Galatians 1:11–16, NIV*^[11]

Acts of the Apostles

The [Acts of the Apostles](#) discusses Paul's conversion experience at three different points in the text, in far more detail than in the accounts in Paul's letters. The Book of Acts says that Paul was on his way from [Jerusalem](#) to Syrian [Damascus](#) with a mandate issued by the [High Priest](#) to seek out and arrest followers of Jesus, with the intention of returning them to Jerusalem as prisoners for questioning and possible execution.^[12] The journey is interrupted when Paul sees a blinding light, and communicates directly with a divine voice.

Acts 9 tells the story as a [third-person narrative](#):

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Paul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

— *Acts 9:3–9, NIV*^[13]

The account continues with a description of [Ananias of Damascus](#) receiving a divine revelation instructing him to visit Saul at the house of Judas on the [Street Called Straight](#) and there [lay hands](#) on him to restore his sight (the house of Judas is traditionally believed to have been near the west end of the street).^[14] Ananias is initially reluctant, having heard about Saul's persecution, but obeys the divine command:

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Acts' second telling of Paul's conversion occurs in a speech Paul gives when he is arrested in Jerusalem.^[16] Paul addresses the crowd and tells them of his conversion, with a description essentially the same as that in Acts 9, but with slight differences. For example, Acts 9:7^[17] notes that Paul's companions did not see who he was speaking to, while Acts 22:9^[18] indicates that they did share in seeing the light (see also [Differences between the accounts](#), below). The speech is clearly tailored for its Jewish audience, with stress being placed in Acts 22:12^[19] on Ananias's good reputation among Jews in Damascus, rather than on his Christianity.^[20]

Acts' third discussion of Paul's conversion occurs when Paul addresses [King Agrippa](#), defending himself against the accusations of [antinomianism](#) that have been made against him.^[21] This account is briefer than the others. The speech here is again tailored for its audience, emphasizing what a Roman ruler would understand: the need to obey a heavenly vision,^[22] and reassuring Agrippa that Christians were not a secret society.^{[23][24]}

Differences between the accounts

A contradiction in the details of the account of Paul's revelatory vision given in Acts has been the subject of some debate.^[25] Whereas [Acts 9:7](#) states that Paul's travelling companions heard the voice, [Acts 22:9](#) states that they did not. Traditional readings and modern biblical scholarship both see a discrepancy between these passages, but some modern Conservative Evangelical commentators argue that the discrepancy can be explained. [Richard Longenecker](#) argues that first century readers might have understood the two passages to mean that everybody heard the sound of the voice, but "only Paul understood the articulated words".^{[26][27]}

The debate revolves around two Greek words. The noun φωνῆ (*phōnē* - a source of English words such as "telephone", "phonic", and "phoneme") translates as not only "voice, utterance, report, faculty of speech, the call of an animal" but also "sound" when referring to an inanimate object.^[28] However, the normal Greek word for an inarticulate sound is ψόφος (*psophos*).^[29] The verb ἀκούω (*akouō* - a source of English words such as "acoustics"), which usually means "hear", has the secondary meaning of "understand", which is how most translations render it in [1 Cor. 14:2](#), for example.^[30] However, this meaning is so rare that the main English-to-Greek dictionaries do not list ἀκούω among the possible translations of "understand".^[31] Resolving the discrepancy involves translating φωνῆ and ἀκούω in Acts 9:7 as "hear" and "sound" respectively, but translating the same words in Acts 22:9 as "understand" and "voice".^[32]

The [New Revised Standard Version](#) (NRSV), which is commonly the preferred translation of [biblical scholars](#) and used in the most influential publications in the field,^[citation needed] renders the two texts as follows:^[33]

The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. (Acts 9:7)

Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. (Acts 22:9)

Most traditional translations including the English [King James Version](#) (KJV),^[34] the Latin [Vulgate](#),^[35] and [Luther's German translation](#)^[36] are similar, translating the key words identically in each of the parallel texts, and thus not disguising the contradiction. However, since the 1970s,

some versions have attempted a harmonizing translation, including the [New International Version](#) (NIV), which reads:

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. (Acts 9:7)

My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. (Acts 22:9)

Likewise the [NET Bible](#) and others. By translating φωνῆ and ἀκούω differently in each case, the contradiction is eliminated.^[32]

Those who support harmonizing readings sometimes point out that in Acts 9:7, ἀκούω appears in a [participle](#) construction with a [genitive](#) (ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς), and in Acts 22:9 as a [finite verb](#) with an [accusative](#) object (φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν). Nigel Turner suggests the use of the accusative indicates hearing with understanding.^[37] More commonly, proponents of this view have asserted that the genitive is used when a person is heard, the accusative for a thing, which goes in the same direction but yields a far weaker argument.^{[38][39]} New Testament scholars [Daniel B. Wallace](#) and [F.F. Bruce](#) find this argument based on case inconclusive and caution against using it.^{[32][40]} Wallace gathers all examples of ἀκούω with each construction in the New Testament and finds that there are more exceptions to the supposed rule than examples of it. He concludes: "regardless of how one works through the accounts of Paul's conversion, an appeal to different cases probably ought not to form any part of the solution."^[32]

Theological implications

Whereas Protestants saw the conversion as a demonstration of *sola fide*, [Counter-Reformation](#) Catholics saw it as a demonstration, or at least a metaphor for, the power of [preaching](#), which received a strong new emphasis after the [Council of Trent](#).^[41]

The conversion of Paul, in spite of his attempts to completely eradicate Christianity, is seen as evidence of the power of Divine [Grace](#), with "no fall so deep that grace cannot descend to it"^[42] and "no height so lofty that grace cannot lift the sinner to it."^[42] It also demonstrates "God's power to use everything, even the hostile persecutor, to achieve the divine purpose."^[43]

There is no evidence to suggest that Paul arrived on the road to Damascus already with a single, solid, coherent scheme that could form the framework of his mature theology. Instead, the conversion, and the associated understanding of the significance of the [resurrection of the crucified Jesus](#), caused him to rethink from the ground up everything he had ever believed in, from his own identity to his understanding of [Second Temple Judaism](#) and who God really was.^[44]

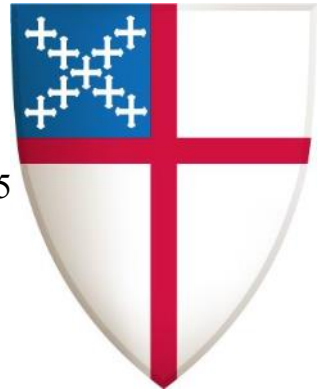
The transforming effect of Paul's conversion influenced the clear antithesis he saw "between righteousness based on the law,"^[45] which he had sought in his former life; and "righteousness based on the death of Christ,"^[45] which he describes, for example, in the [Epistle to the Galatians](#).^[45]

Based on Paul's testimony in [Galatians 1](#) and the accounts in Acts ([Acts 9](#), [22](#), [26](#)), where it is specifically mentioned that Paul was tasked to be a witness to the Gentiles, it could be interpreted that what happened on the road to Damascus was not just a conversion from first-century Judaism to a faith centred on Jesus Christ, but also a commissioning of Paul as an Apostle to the Gentiles—although in Paul's mind they both amounted to the same thing.^[46]

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