

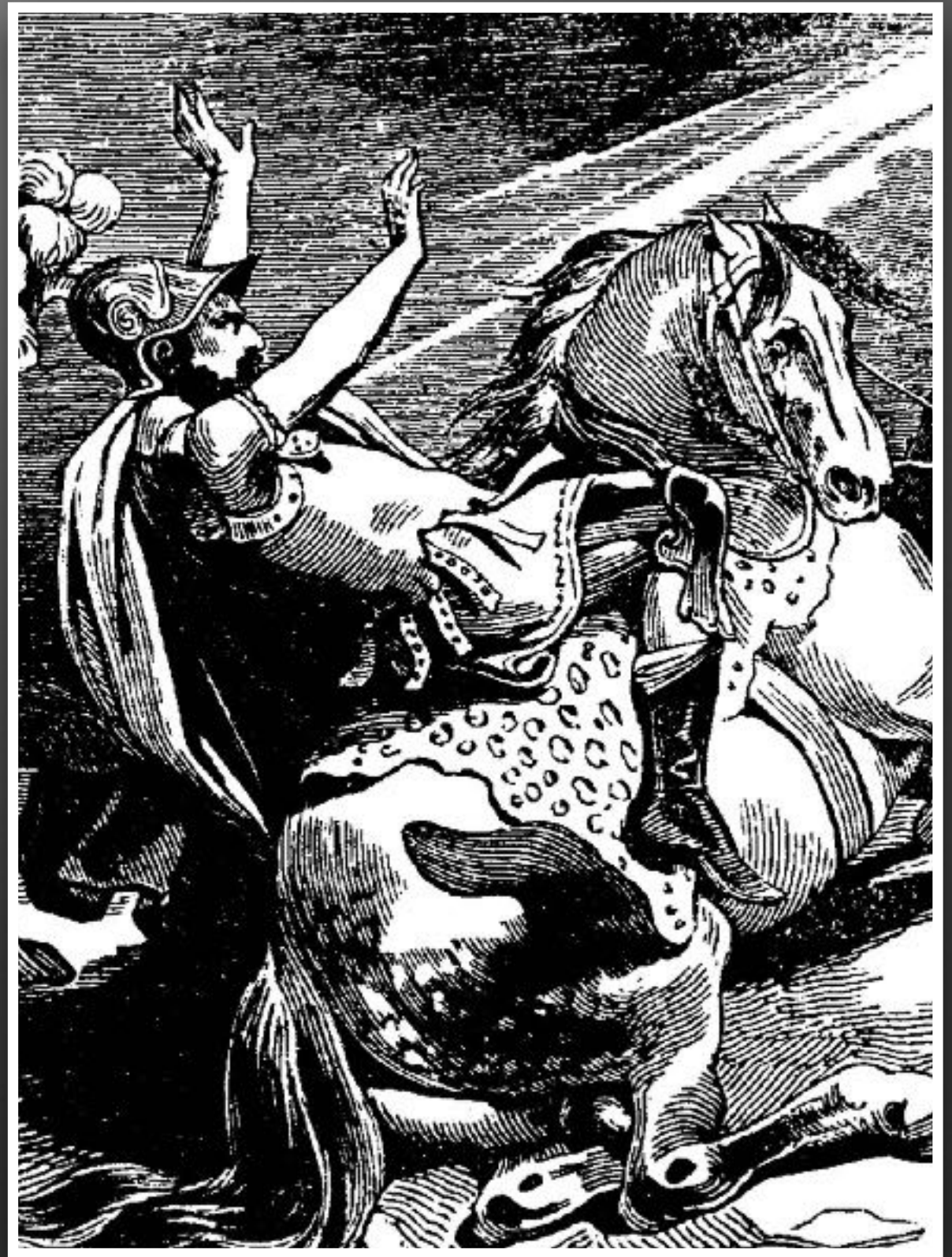


Conversion of Saul

- Saul is first mentioned in Acts 7:58.
- In fact, the name of this Saul is only found in Acts.
- The name of Paul is first mentioned in Acts 13:9, and it is found in many books of the New Testament.
- Saul is likely his Jewish name and Paul his Roman name.

- We first read about Saul in Acts.
- As well as Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, Ananias of Damascus, Dorcas, Agabus, John Mark, Gamaliel, and more

**What do we
know about
Saul?**



- Acts 7:58
- Acts 8:1–4
- Acts 9:1–2
- Acts 26:10–11
- Galatians 1:13
- Born—many think around AD 1–5
- Died—probably between AD 64 and 67

Biblical details of his family are few. We know he had a sister (Acts 23:16).

Jerome, the ancient Bible translator, stated that Saul's parents originally lived in Gischala of Galilee. About 4 BC they were supposed to have been captured by the Romans when they invaded Judea and taken as slaves to Tarsus, the chief city of Cilicia, where they eventually gained their freedom, prospered, and became Roman citizens. Later Saul was born there.
(From *SDA BC*)

Jerome said the Romans captured people from Gischala and took them to Tarsus.

By a straight line it is about 271 miles between the two places but longer for those who walked it.



The Bible says Saul was born in Tarsus (Acts 22:3),
circumcised on the 8th day (Philippians 3:5). He
was of the tribe of Benjamin, (Philippians 3:5), as
was King Saul.

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He was born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28) and was also a citizen of the city of Tarsus (21:39). He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews (Philippians 3:5), a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:5) and taught by Gamaliel (22:3).

He was trained in the “perfect manner of the law” and “zealous toward God” (22:3). He was also zealous of the traditions (Galatians 1:14), and he was a major force in the persecution against the Christians.

He was regarded by the rabbis as a young man of great promise, and high hopes were cherished concerning him as an able and zealous defender of the ancient faith. His elevation to membership in the Sanhedrin council placed him in a position of power. (AA 112.1)

The additional name of Paul is first seen in Acts 13:9, where we read of “Saul (who also is called Paul),” but why was a second name used and did it replace the name of Saul?

Tarsus was a place where people spoke different languages. There were various native tongues representing different groups of people, and added to this were Greek and Latin, so it was common for people to speak not only their birth language but also these additional two, and because of this many of the people came to be known by more than one name, a birth name and a local name, such as a Roman (i.e. Latin) name.

Saul converted was called Paul. He united with the disciples, and was among the chief of the apostles.
(14LtMs, Ms 95, 1899, par. 5)

In fact, in Acts 21, we find Paul speaking with a Roman officer, and he responded that he was a Roman citizen of Tarsus, rather than being a Pharisee of Jerusalem.

Tarsus was a large city at the time of Paul, but archeological remains for this time period are sparse, such as a short stretch of Roman road. It was a very old settlement, with a history dating several centuries prior to the Roman period.

In Paul's day, Tarsus was a prosperous port city, even though it was ten miles up river from the Mediterranean Sea. The Cydnus River ran through the city and emptied into the Mediterranean Sea, and boats were able to travel up the river to Tarsus to unload their wares, so Tarsus was a thriving commercial hub. It was also the capital of its region. In addition, it was a noted center for higher learning, supposedly surpassing Athens and Alexandria. Paul called it "no mean city" (Acts 21:39).



Saul and Stephen

Acts 7:58

Saul had taken a prominent part in the trial and conviction of Stephen, and the striking evidences of God's presence with the martyr had led Saul to doubt the righteousness of the cause he had espoused against the followers of Jesus. His mind was deeply stirred. In his perplexity he appealed to those in whose wisdom and judgment he had full confidence. The arguments of the priests and rulers finally convinced him that Stephen was a blasphemer, that the Christ whom the martyred disciple had preached was an impostor, and that those ministering in holy office must be right. (AA 112.2)

Not without severe trial did Saul come to this conclusion. But in the end his education and prejudices, his respect for his former teachers, and his pride of popularity braced him to rebel against the voice of conscience and the grace of God. And having fully decided that the priests and scribes were right, Saul became very bitter in his opposition to the doctrines taught by the disciples of Jesus. His activity in causing holy men and women to be dragged before tribunals, where some were condemned to imprisonment and some even to death, solely because of their faith in Jesus, brought sadness and gloom to the newly organized church, and caused many to seek safety in flight. (AA 113.1)

- Daniel and his friends
- Joseph
- Jeremiah
- Peter and John
- Stephen
- Early Christians

- His education
- His prejudices
- His respect for former teachers
- His pride of popularity
- Braced him to rebel against the voice of conscience and the grace of God

The priests and rulers had hoped that by vigilant effort and stern persecution the heresy might be suppressed. Now they felt that they must carry forward in other places the decided measures taken in Jerusalem against the new teaching. For the special work that they desired to have done at Damascus, Saul offered his services. “Breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” he “went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.” Thus “with authority and commission from the chief priests” (Acts 26:12), Saul of Tarsus, in the strength and vigor of manhood, and fired with mistaken zeal, set out on that memorable journey, the strange occurrences of which were to change the whole current of his life. (AA 113.3)

Damascus was about 135 miles northeast of Jerusalem in a straight line but about 175 miles by road.



The Story of the Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Acts 9:3–31

Acts 22:6–21 (to the people from the stairs of the castle)

Acts 26:12–20 (to Agrippa)

And now this Jesus, who had, while teaching upon earth, spoken in parables to his hearers, using familiar objects to illustrate his meaning, likened the work of Saul, in persecuting the followers of Christ, to kicking against the pricks. **Those forcible words illustrated the fact that it would be impossible for any man to stay the onward progress of the truth of Christ.** It would march on to triumph and victory, while every effort to stay it would result in injury to the opposer. The persecutor, in the end, would suffer a thousand-fold more than those whom he had persecuted. Sooner or later his own mind and heart would condemn him; he would find that he had, indeed, been kicking against the pricks. (3SP 308.2)

I was shown in the vision given me of the Judgment, that God would send warnings, counsels, and reproof. Some would take heed to their ways and seek the Lord, while some would follow their own judgment because it was more convenient and pleasing to their own natural hearts to do so, [and] while some others would **kick against the pricks**, rise up against the testimonies of reproof, despise the warnings, choose their own wisdom, be ensnared and overcome by the enemy, and so blinded by his infatuations [that] they would be utterly unable to discern the things of God and would work directly against the light, enshrouding themselves in darkness and error. Then these very ones would sustain and strengthen the hands of our bitterest enemies. (14MR 1.3)

The scene was one of the greatest confusion. The companions of Saul were stricken with terror, and almost blinded by the intensity of the light. They heard the voice, but saw no one, and to them all was unintelligible and mysterious. But Saul, lying prostrate upon the ground, understood the words that were spoken, and saw clearly before him the Son of God. One look upon that glorious Being, imprinted his image forever upon the soul of the stricken Jew. The words struck home to his heart with appalling force. **A flood of light poured in upon the darkened chambers of his mind, revealing his ignorance and error.** He saw that, while imagining himself to be zealously serving God in persecuting the followers of Christ, he had in reality been doing the work of Satan.

(3SP 307.1)

He saw his folly in resting his faith upon the **assurances of the priests and rulers**, whose sacred office had given them great influence over his mind, and caused him to believe that the story of the resurrection was an artful fabrication of the disciples of Jesus. Now that Christ was revealed to Saul, the **sermon of Stephen** was brought forcibly to his mind. Those words which the priests had pronounced blasphemy, now appeared to him as truth and verity. In that time of wonderful illumination, his mind acted with remarkable rapidity. He traced down through **prophetic history**, and saw that the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension had been foretold by the prophets, and proved him to be the promised Messiah. He remembered the words of Stephen: "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God;" and he knew that the dying saint had looked upon the kingdom of Glory. (3SP 307.2)

What a revelation was all this to the persecutor of the believers. Clear, but terrible light had broken in upon his soul. **Christ was revealed to him** as having come to earth in fulfillment of his mission, being rejected, abused, condemned, and crucified by those whom he came to save, and as having risen from the dead, and ascended into the heavens. In that terrible moment he remembered that the holy Stephen had been sacrificed by his consent; and that through his instrumentality many worthy saints had met their death by cruel persecution.

“And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? (3SP 308.1–.2)

- He was baptized.
- Spent certain days with the disciples at Damascus
- Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God.
- All that heard him were amazed.
- Saul increased in strength and confounded the Jews at Damascus, proving that this is the very Christ.
- V. 23—Galatians 1:17, 18

The opposition grew so fierce that Paul was not allowed to continue his labors at Damascus. A messenger from heaven bade him leave for a time, and he “went into Arabia” (Galatians 1:17), where he found a safe retreat. (AA 125.2)

From Arabia Paul “returned again unto Damascus” (Galatians 1:17), and “preached boldly ... in the name of Jesus.” Unable to withstand the wisdom of his arguments, “the Jews took counsel to kill him.” The gates of the city were diligently guarded day and night to cut off his escape. This crisis led the disciples to seek God earnestly, and finally they “took him by night, and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.”

Acts 9:25, R.V. (AA 128.2)

After his escape from Damascus, Paul went to Jerusalem, about three years having passed since his conversion. His chief object in making this visit, as he himself declared afterward, was “to see Peter.” Galatians 1:18. Upon arriving in the city where he had once been well known as “Saul the persecutor,” “he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.” It was difficult for them to believe that so bigoted a Pharisee, and one who had done so much to destroy the church, could become a sincere follower of Jesus. “But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” (AA 128.3)

Upon hearing this, the disciples received him as one of their number. Soon they had abundant evidence as to the genuineness of his Christian experience. The future apostle to the Gentiles was now in the city where many of his former associates lived, and to these Jewish leaders he longed to make plain the prophecies concerning the Messiah, which had been fulfilled by the advent of the Saviour. Paul felt sure that these teachers in Israel, with whom he had once been so well acquainted, were as sincere and honest as he had been. (AA 129.1)

But he had miscalculated the spirit of his Jewish brethren, and in the hope of their speedy conversion he was doomed to bitter disappointment. Although “he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians,” those who stood at the head of the Jewish church refused to believe, but “went about to slay him.” Sorrow filled his heart. He would willingly have yielded up his life if by that means he might bring some to a knowledge of the truth. With shame he thought of the active part he had taken in the martyrdom of Stephen, and now in his anxiety to wipe out the stain resting upon one so falsely accused, he sought to vindicate the truth for which Stephen had given his life. (AA 129.1)

Burdened in behalf of those who refused to believe,
Paul was praying in the temple, as he himself
afterward testified, when he fell into a trance;
whereupon a heavenly messenger appeared before
him and said, “Make haste, and get thee quickly out of
Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony
concerning Me.” Acts 22:18. (AA 130.1)

Paul was inclined to remain at Jerusalem, where he could face the opposition. To him it seemed an act of cowardice to flee, if by remaining he might be able to convince some of the obstinate Jews of the truth of the gospel message, even if to remain should cost him his life. And so he answered, “Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee: and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was also standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.” But it was not in harmony with the purpose of God that His servant should needlessly expose his life; and the heavenly messenger replied, “Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.” Acts 22:19–21. (AA 130.2)

Upon learning of this vision, the brethren hastened Paul's secret escape from Jerusalem, for fear of his assassination. "They brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus." The departure of Paul suspended for a time the violent opposition of the Jews, and the church had a period of rest, in which many were added to the number of believers. (AA 130.3)



**Can you think of other people in
the Bible who were converted?**

- Nineveh—Jonah 3
- Zacchaeus—Luke 19
- Woman at the well—John 4
- Peter—Luke 21:62; John 21:15
- Thief on the cross—Luke 23:39
- Crowd at Pentecost—Acts 2:14
- People of Samaria—Acts 8:12
- Ethiopian eunuch—Acts 8:26
- Saul of Tarsus—Acts 9
- Cornelius and his household—Acts 10:48
- Lydia and her household—Acts 16:15
- Philippian jailer and his household—Acts 16:33
- Ephesians who practiced magic—Acts 19:18