

## Paul's Conversion

We'll call them the Itineraries of Paul. But before we go into it, I want to review some of the background of the life of the Apostle Paul. First of all Paul was a Pharisee. He was the son of a Pharisee of the tribe of Benjamin. We find this in **Acts 23:6-8**:

But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

This was real significant, because the Pharisees believed that there was a resurrection. The Sadducees did not. Paul was not a Pharisee just because he decided to be one; he was born a Pharisee. His parents were Pharisees.

A Pharisee was one who was very conservative in Judaism. They were opposed to the Roman rule. They believed in the resurrection. They believed in a lot of other things that the more liberal groups, like the Sadducees, did not believe. The Pharisees, in this respect, were very conservative. Paul was a Pharisee; a conservative.

The liberal Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. They didn't believe in angels. They didn't believe in spirits. They believed in, basically, nothing. It's just like the conservatives today, in the twentieth century. You've got the same basic groups. You can divide them like that.

Pharisees despised the Roman rule. The Sadducees went along with it. The Pharisees were very much opposed to the Greek culture that had been forced upon them, even to the point that they didn't like the Greek language and would steer away from the Greek language, which gives you some idea of the language Paul must have spoken. He was a Roman citizen, born in a city that was a Greek town. He may have had some Greek influence in his early years, but he was still a Pharisee and therefore very much opposed to the Greek language and the Greek culture.

Paul was also a Hebrew, of Hebrew parents. **Philippians 3:4-5**:

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

Circumcised the eighth day, *of* the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

“the eighth day” - Paul was circumcised the eighth day according to what the law said

“of the stock of Israel” – he was an Israelite

“the tribe of Benjamin” – gives you a more specific idea of his background. Incidentally, when the kingdom was divided, Benjamin went with Judah. It was part of Judaism. Benjamin and Judah made up what was later known as Judaea. The other ten tribes, when the kingdom split after Solomon (remember Rehoboam and Jeroboam), were known as Israel. Paul came out of the Judean sect.

“an Hebrew of the Hebrews” – a Hebrew was an Aramaic speaking Jew. A Hellenist is a Greek speaking Jew. Paul was not a Hellenist. He was a Hebrew, which is an Aramaic speaking Jew. The Pharisees were Hebrews. They despised the Greek language and the Greek culture that had been forced upon them by the Seleucids when they had invaded the Palestine area.

**Philippians 3:6:**

Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

“touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” – the Apostle Paul walked according to the Old Testament law. He was blameless in the law.

“Concerning zeal, persecuting the church” - He was a persecutor of the Christians, which is what it took to be a good Jew at that time, because the Christians were “an outside, external force, who were opposed to the Jews,” just like the Greeks. The Christians really weren't opposed to anybody. They wanted everybody to become a Christian. They were an opposition as far as the Jews were concerned, just like the Greeks and the Romans were. They treated Christianity the same way.

**Philippians 3:7:**

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

“what things were gain to me” – the things that were advantageous to me personally

**Acts 21:39:**

But Paul said, I am a man *which am* a Jew of Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

“in Cilicia” – of Cilicia

“a citizen” – if he would have been born in Palestine, he could not have been a Roman citizen, but he was born in Tarsus.

How long did he live in Tarsus? It doesn't say. For me to read into it: that he lived there all his life until he went to Jerusalem when he was about 20-25 and that he was raised in the Greek culture and spoke the Greek language, then I'm reading into it. But that's what everybody has done and said, “Paul spoke Greek,” so you've got everything written in Greek in the New Testament. That's not Paul. Paul was a Pharisee, a Hebrew; an Aramaic speaking Jew.

He was still a Roman citizen because he was born at the right place at the right time. When he was in prison, a couple of times that kept him from getting the “treatment,” because he was a Roman citizen. They would have beat people that were not citizens of the country. They would have stoned them. They would have killed them, but not a Roman citizen. That helped Paul more than once.

**Acts 22:3:**

I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and* taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

“born in Tarsus” – It says he was “born” in Tarsus. It doesn't say he lived there all his life.

The fourth thing I want you to remember about Paul is: born at Tarsus.

The fifth thing is: he was trained by Gamaliel.

“brought up in this city” - Where was he brought up? In “this” city; Jerusalem.

He was born in Tarsus but brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel. Gamaliel was a doctor of the law, a Pharisee, just as zealous of the law as the apostle Paul was before his conversion. Gamaliel was one of the strict ones of the Pharisees, very strict. There are accounts in profane literature that talk about Gamaliel; that say Gamaliel despised even an Aramaic translation of the Old Testament. He even buried the book of Job at one time, the source says.

How do you think his students would feel if they followed in his footsteps?

He was trained by doctor Gamaliel. Why do you think Paul was trained by doctor Gamaliel? He was trained for the Sanhedrin. Gamaliel was a member of the Sanhedrin.

**Acts 5:34:**

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a

doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

He was there with the Sanhedrin; one of the great outspoken men on the Sanhedrin. He gave some great practical wisdom in that particular decision. Paul was trained by him. If Paul was brought up, do you think maybe Paul might have been around, about this time, when some of these things were happening? What do you think was hitting Paul's brain cells? I'll bet once in awhile he heard the Word. I'll bet he saw, or at least heard of the apostles, Peter and John, going through the gate Beautiful and how that lame man got up and started walking. I'll bet he heard about their teaching. I'll bet he heard a few things about what happened on the day of Pentecost. Maybe he didn't believe it, but I want to tell you something; when words go into your ear, they get into your mind, your subconscious. Maybe Paul didn't believe in these early years of the Church but already God was laying the seed of His Word in his heart. Paul was already starting to get some information.

Paul was being trained by Gamaliel for the Sanhedrin, perhaps to take his place on the Sanhedrin.

In the book of Acts in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter, you have the record of the 7 men that were chosen to serve tables. Stephen was one of them.

**Acts 6:8-15:**

And Stephen, full of faith ["grace" is the text] and power, did great wonders and miracles [or "signs"] among the people.

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called *the synagogue* of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and *against* God.

And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon *him*, and caught him, and brought *him* to the council [the word "council" is "Sanhedrin"],

And set up false witnesses, which said, This man [Stephen] ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

**Acts 6:8-15:** (cont.)

And all that sat in the council [Sanhedrin], looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. [not an angel - "as" an angel – figure of speech]

The Sanhedrin looked upon him. Where was Stephen? Stephen was before the Sanhedrin. All of chapter 7 deals with what Stephen told the Sanhedrin. You should read it.

**Acts 7:54-56:**

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with *their* teeth.

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

He was standing because some was down there doing something. He was fighting for him; standing for him.

**Acts 7:57-58:**

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

And cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

Where was Saul? With these men of the Sanhedrin. He was trained at the feet of Gamaliel, who was on the Sanhedrin. It doesn't say, "He was being trained for the Sanhedrin," but you figure it out. What do you think he was being trained for?

"whose name was Saul" – I thought his name was Paul. Saul is his Hebrew name. Paul is his Greek name. That's all there is to it. It's Saul in the Hebrew. It's Saul in the Greek. It wasn't that it was "Saul" before his conversion and "Paul" afterward. You'll see later on that he was called Saul even after his conversion.

**Acts 7:59-60:**

And they stoned Stephen, calling [Stephen was calling] upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

**Acts 8:1:**

And Saul was consenting unto [approving of] his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

He was being trained by Gamaliel for the Sanhedrin. In order to be on the Sanhedrin you had to be a husband and the father of at least one child. Later on in Corinthians, Paul talks about being single. Something must have happened to Paul's wife. I'm not saying what happened. That would be pure guesswork

"except the apostles" - The apostles stayed at Jerusalem. The Jews in that day, like the Sanhedrin and others of the priests and so-on, were putting the pressure on the Christians because the Christians were gaining in numbers. Like it says in different records in Acts, "they were filled with envy." They were envious of the Christians because they were gaining momentum; winning a lot of people from Judaism to Christianity.

Christianity is an outreach group, it's not a religion. Christianity is designed for outreach. That's the way God made it. Judaism was not necessarily, although there were proselytes; the Gentile converts. But for the most part, it was not an outreach ministry, Christianity was. It was made available to the Jew and Gentile.

For the most part they stayed right at home. They witnessed right in their own city. They won a lot of people but they just sat there; they weren't reaching out. Jesus Christ told them, "Look, you're going to be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth." They hadn't even carried it out and we've just finished seven chapters of Acts. That's a few years. They had not yet carried out that promise, but it took a little persecution. When the persecution got on from the Jews then they started moving out to Judea and Samaria.

There's persecution today, but nothing like stoning men, whipping them; not like this. If the Word's going to reach to everybody, there's got to be a real increase in the outreach and people opening their mouths and not shutting up but speaking the Word. It can't stop with just one fellowship. It's got to grow. It's got to get to the place where your home isn't big enough to hold your fellowship. Unless that happens, it'll take another persecution, I guess, to really get them moving because, when the pressure gets on, that's many times when people are forced to make a decision. How much easier and better it is to make that decision before the pressure gets on?

When the pressure finally got on, they started believing the promise; that it wasn't just for Jerusalem but for Judea and Samaria as well. So they went out.

**Acts 8:2:**

And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him.

**Acts 8:3:**

As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house [not church building or cathedral], and haling men and women committed *them* to prison.

Where did the Church meet in the first century? Where did Paul go to get them? The house.

**Acts 8:4:**

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

Maybe the pressure got on, but when it did, the tough got going. Everywhere they went, they taught the Word. But Paul made havock of the church, still persecuting Christians.

Where was he when Stephen was stoned? He was standing by. Do you think maybe some of the words that Stephen spoke reached his ear? Do you think maybe some of the words the apostles had spoken reached Paul's ear, maybe not directly but by word of transmission, you know; word of mouth? Do you think some of those things started lodging somewhere in his mind; his subconscious or something? When God knew he was ready to believe, He hit him over the head.

That's where we want to go; to Paul's conversion, in **Acts 9:1-8:**

**Acts 9:1:**

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

“breathing out threatenings” – isn't that a picturesque description of what he was doing? You get a picture of a dragon breathing out fire. It's a figure of speech.

“went unto the high priest” – in order to get an audience with the high priest, you've got to be pretty far up the ladder. He was trained by Gamaliel. He was a strong follower of the high priest and those about him there.

**Acts 9:2:**

And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this [the] way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

He wasn't just going up there on his own. He was going on an official trip to Damascus.

**Acts 9:3:**

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

Between verses 2 and 3 it's like a figure. I don't know the names of every figure. In verse 2 Paul desired of the high priest letters. He went to the high priest and said, "Will you give me an official document to go up to Jerusalem." Then it never says the high priest gave him the letters. It goes right into, "And as he journeyed..." What's the implication? He got the papers.

**Acts 9:4-5:**

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

For some reason I've got a question mark after "thou." "Who art thou? Lord?" That's kind of neat.

"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" – What do you think that did to his chains of neurons? It had been working in his mind. He had heard the things that were going on. What Stephen said, had to lodge in his mind. God knew now is the moment.

**Acts 9:6-7:**

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man [one].

It says these men stood speechless. They were flabbergasted; amazed and they heard a voice but they did not see anything. The vision, or the revelation, was only to Paul. The others did not see anyone. They only heard a voice.

**Acts 9:8:**

And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus.

God did not blind Saul with a bright light. The reason Paul was blinded was the work of the adversary. It was not God's will for Paul to be blinded. Perhaps it was because of his fear. Perhaps he had realized what he had done, where he had been. Instead of openly accepting the Word and standing on it, which is sometimes difficult for the human mind that's been wrapped up in these other things so long, he was filled with



fear. I don't know because it doesn't say. But I know God didn't blind him. God does all good. The adversary does all bad. As a man believes, is how he receives.

**Acts 22:1-5:**

Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence *which I make* now unto you.

(And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,)

I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and* taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

And I persecuted this [the] way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

That tells you briefly, in a capsule, what he had done in Acts chapter 9 and before.

**Acts 22:6-9:**

And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; ["and were afraid" are not in the text] but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

"heard not the voice" – Wait a minute. In the record in Acts 9 it said they heard the voice. Here it says they did not hear the voice that spake to him. There's something wrong.

**Acts 22:10-11:**

And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

And when I could not see for [away from] the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

It wasn't the glory of the light that caused Paul to be blind but again, because of his fear or some kind of unbelief that triggered this and allowed the adversary to get in and blind him. It was God's desire and will for Paul to see for a change. He'd been blind all his life. Now He wanted him to see. He didn't want to blind him. The adversary had other ideas.

Now we go back to **Acts 22:9:**

And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

We read in **Acts 9:7:**

And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man [one].

They heard the voice but they didn't see anyone. In chapter 22 it says they saw the light. It doesn't say they saw a person. They saw the light. But they did not here the voice. Now you've got an apparent contradiction. The first place you look is in the mind; the understanding. The second place you look is translation.

The word "voice" in Greek is *phonē*. Whatever this word is, maybe they didn't hear a voice. Maybe they heard a sound. Maybe they heard a tweet. Maybe they heard a peep. Maybe they heard a groan. Whatever that word [*phonē*] is, if it's in the genitive case; the word "hear" means one thing. But if it [*phonē*] is in the accusative case, then the word "hear" means something else.

If the word "voice" is in the genitive case then "hear" means one thing. If it's in the accusative case then "hear" means something else. The genitive case is usually, or normally, translated with the word "of." "He heard of a voice," means something different than, "he heard a voice." "He heard of a sound," is different than, "he heard a sound. To "hear of words," is different than to, "hear words." If I hear words then I understand what's being spoken. But if I only hear of the words, then I don't understand exactly, by experience, what's being said. That's just if you took it literal in the English.

Whenever this is with the genitive case, the word "hear" means simply "to hear whatever it is that's heard." But when it's with the accusative case, it means "to hear to the point of understanding what is spoken."

“I hear a voice.” – If the word “voice” is in the genitive case, it means I just heard a voice.

– If the word “voice” is in the accusative case, it means to hear to the point of understanding.

The one in Acts 9, where they heard the voice, is in the genitive case; the word “voice.” They heard the voice. The one in Acts 22 is in the accusative case. They did not hear it to the point of understanding it. Why didn't they hear to the point of understanding what was spoken? Perhaps it was barely audible. Perhaps it was only audible to the point of understanding for Paul, but the others could only hear it barely. Perhaps it was in a different language. Perhaps the others spoke Greek and the voice was in Aramaic. I don't know. But for some reason, they could hear the sounds of it but they could not understand what was spoken.

If you want to check out some other places where this word “voice” is used, look at **Acts 9:4; 11:7; 22:7,9&14; 26:14.**

When it says somebody hears a voice and it's genitive could they understand it? It's possible but when it says they did not hear the voice and it's the accusative case, you know that they did not hear it to the point of understanding. That's what you have to watch.

There's one other place where there's a record of Paul's conversion and that's in chapter 26.

**Acts 26:9-18:** I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against *them*.

And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted *them* even unto strange cities.

Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice [accusative case: to point of understanding] speaking unto me, and saying in the

Hebrew [Aramaic] tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

It specifically says that he talked to them in the Aramaic tongue. Again, all I know is that they heard it but they did not understand what was spoken. That I do know.

**Acts 26:14-16a:**

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

But rise, and stand upon thy feet:

The order is: why persecute – I am Jesus – arise stand on your feet.

**Acts 22:7b, 8 & 10a:**

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus;

Same order as chapter 26: why persecute – I am Jesus – arise.

**Acts 9:4-6:**

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

“it’s hard for thee to kick against the pricks” – comes after he says “I am Jesus.” In **Acts 26:14**, “it’s hard for thee to kick against the pricks” came after “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”

You’ve got a variance in the order. It doesn’t fit. In **Acts 9:5-6:**

“*it is* hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him.”

All of that material is not in any critical Greek texts except the Stephens and the Elsevier texts. All the other criticals omit it. The only manuscripts it occurs in is a few old Latin manuscripts and a late Syriac manuscript; the Harklean. And it’s not in the Harklean text; it’s in the margin of it. So, those words should not be in verses 5 & 6.

I knew there had to be a reason for the order here, being screwed up; because it wasn’t in one of the texts. Whenever you have something that doesn’t fit, there’s got to be a misunderstanding or wrong translation. In this case it’s wrong translation. The same way with that “voice” business; it was in translation.

Question – Because it’s genitive, could you say, “they heard of a voice?”

I think it’s easier to leave it as, “they heard the voice but not necessarily to the point of understanding.” It’s more accurate. To say, “they heard of a voice” in English, could have the connotation “they heard somebody else said something about it.”

We’ll pick up again with Paul’s conversion. We’ve come through some of these big things in here you need to understand but there’s more to it than that. We’ll run through these records again and God’s commissioning of Paul and some of these things that He told him as to what he was going to do and what his ministry was.

