



The Apostle Paul, Servant of Christ



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Overview Study Guide

Unit I, Chapter Two

"Paul's Conversion"

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Part I: The Person, Chapter Two

Introduction

Clearly the decisive turning point in Paul's earthly life came in his conversion to Christianity. Up to that point he had been a rising young star in the Pharisaical movement of Judaism. Everything was comfortably Jewish with the smug sense that he was a part of God's chosen people who enjoyed special privilege with the God of this universe. His passionate commitment to the principles of Judaism as understood by the Pharisees was providing him opportunity to rapidly gain fame and recognition as one of the most devoted of the Pharisees to the God of Abraham. But on one of the roads leading into the Syrian city of Damascus, Saul of Tarsus encountered the risen Christ in a dramatic experience that changed the course of his life. Later he returned to Jerusalem, not longer a persecutor of Christianity but a preacher of it.

What was the nature of this religious experience? Is Paul's experience meant to be normative for everyone coming to Christ? These and many other questions have arisen over the centuries of Bible study and Christian understanding. Because of the profound impact of Paul on the Christian movement, careful attention needs to be given to this central event in his religious journey.



2.1.0 Christian Conversion

Two main sources of understanding of this event are found in the pages of the New Testament. Luke provides us with the more historical oriented depiction, while Paul gives a more theological depiction in several of his letters. Bringing these two perspectives together has occasioned considerable discussion and debate among Christian scholars for many centuries. Out of this comes questions and issues defining the nature of Christian 'initiation' experience. What is conversion? How else can it be described? What perspective can be traced regarding it in the writings of Paul? How do these compare to other writers in the New Testament? All these concerns will be addressed at the end under **2.3.0 Paul's Theology of Conversion**.

2.1.1 Luke's Description

The depiction of Paul's conversion is presented by Luke in Acts in two ways. **First**, in chapter nine he records a historical description of Paul's encounter with the risen Christ. **Then** in chapters twenty-two and twenty-

six, a recounting of the experience is placed in two defense speeches given by Paul before Jewish and government authorities after his arrest in Jerusalem.¹ Do these three accounts in Acts harmonize with one another? What is the distinctive emphasis of each account? Why three accounts rather than just one? These and many other questions have been raised over the years of careful study of these texts.

So, let's take a look at each of them first, and afterwards compare them with one another. There's much for us to learn here.

2.1.1.1 The Event at Damascus

Secondary Source:

Acts 9:1-19a

1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." 11 The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

9.1 Ὁ δὲ Σαῦλος ἔτι ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόβου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου, προσελθὼν τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ 2 ἠτήσατο παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολάς εἰς Δαμασκὸν πρὸς τὰς συναγωγάς, ὅπως ἐάν τις εὔρη τῆς ὁδοῦ ὄντας, ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, δεδεμένους ἀγάγῃ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ. 3 ἐν δὲ τῷ πορεύεσθαι ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐγγίζειν τῇ Δαμασκῷ, ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 4 καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; 5 εἶπεν δέ· Τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δέ· Ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις· 6 ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ εἰσελθε εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ λαληθήσεται σοι ὃ τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν. 7 οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ εἰστήκεισαν ἔνεοί, ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς μηδὲνα δὲ θεωροῦντες. 8 ἠγέρθη δὲ Σαῦλος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἀνεωγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν· χειραγωγοῦντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσήγαγον εἰς Δαμασκόν. 9 καὶ ἦν ἡμέρας τρεῖς μὴ βλέπων, καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲ ἔπιεν.

10 Ἦν δὲ τις μαθητῆς ἐν Δαμασκῷ ὀνόματι Ἀνανίας, καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ὄραματι ὁ κύριος· Ἀνανία· ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· Ἰδοὺ ἐγώ, κύριε. 11 ὁ δὲ κύριος πρὸς αὐτόν· Ἀναστὰς πορεύθητι ἐπὶ τὴν ῥύμην τὴν καλουμένην Εὐθεῖαν καὶ ζήτησον ἐν οἰκίᾳ Ἰούδα Σαῦλον ὀνόματι Ταρσεά, ἰδοὺ γὰρ προσεύχεται, 12 καὶ εἶδεν ἄνδρα ἐν ὄραματι Ἀνανίαν ὀνόματι εἰσελθόντα καὶ ἐπιθέντα αὐτῷ χεῖρας ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃ. 13 ἀπεκρίθη δὲ Ἀνανίας· Κύριε, ἤκουσα ἀπὸ πολλῶν περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου, ὅσα κακὰ τοῖς ἀγίοις σου ἐποίησεν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ· 14 καὶ ὥδε ἔχει ἐξουσίαν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων δῆσαι πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομά σου. 15 εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· Πορεύου, ὅτι σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἔθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἱῶν τε Ἰσραὴλ, 16 ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑποδείξω αὐτῷ ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν. 17 ἀπήλθεν δὲ Ἀνανίας καὶ εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, καὶ ἐπιθείς ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας εἶπεν· Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ὁ κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με, Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὀφθεις σοι ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἧ ἤρχου, ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃς καὶ πλησθῆς πνεύματος ἀγίου. 18 καὶ εὐθέως ἀπέπεσαν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ὡς λεπίδες, ἀνέβλεψεν τε καὶ ἀναστὰς ἐβαπτίσθη, 19 καὶ λαβὼν τροφὴν ἐνίσχυσεν.

¹“The narrative of Saul’s conversion is strategically placed between the mass conversion of the Samaritans and the conversion of the first Gentiles (cf. 10:45; 11:18). In contrast to the pious and open-minded Ethiopian who was an ideal candidate for conversion, Saul was furiously ‘opposing God’ (5:39) and ‘breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord’ (9:1). This unlikely candidate for conversion would become the Lord’s chosen instrument, not by his own volition but by the gracious will of Christ; he also would assume an ever-increasing role in Acts. The importance of Saul’s conversion is highlighted by Luke, who tells it three times: in chap. 9 in the form of a narrative, in 22:4–16 and 26:9–18 in the form of autobiographical reports by Paul.” [Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 171-72.]

A helpful way of getting into a historically oriented text is through the use of some of the techniques of 'Narrative Criticism,'² which is a more recently developed literary method of reading ancient texts, especially historically oriented biblical texts. We will adopt a very simplified version of this approach for our study of the Acts texts, not only to help us better understand the meaning of the passages, but it will also demonstrate how many biblical scholars today are drawing upon modern techniques of literary analysis for Bible study. The analytical elements that we will utilize are setting, characterization, and plotting. Some attention will also be given to scene depiction and structure.³

Setting. The narrative setting of a story centers on identification of scenes in the story, which are determined by identifying the place / time references and 'movements' from one location to another as the story progresses. Very clearly this narrative text has three 'scenes' with the third one divided into multiple segments.

Scene 1: Jerusalem.

Acts 9:1-2. 1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

9.1 Ὁ δὲ Σαῦλος ἐπὶ ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου, προσελθὼν τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ 2 ἤτησεν παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολὰς εἰς Δαμασκὸν πρὸς τὰς συναγωγάς, ὅπως ἐάν τις εὕρη τῆς ὁδοῦ ὄντας, ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, δεδεμένους ἀγάγη εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ.

In verses one and two, the location mentioned here is the city of Jerusalem. Although not so identified directly, the action here took place at the residence of the high priest. Interest in Paul is resumed here, after mentioning him in passing in 7:58 and 8:1-3

58 Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul....

1 And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. **2** Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. **3** But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.⁴

²During my years at Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary at Fort Worth, Texas I developed and taught a PhD seminar entitled "New Testament Critical Methodology." In that year long doctoral seminar, the students explored a wide variety of technical approaches to the study of the New Testament. We analyzed each approach from both historical and literary perspectives in the fall semester, and then critically tested them out on specific New Testament texts in the spring semester. Out of that experience came much greater insights into various ways to gain understanding of the biblical texts.

³The full blown procedure is much more detailed and complex than we can do here in our limited study. But with skill development as a part of the objective for the study guide, some exposure to this increasingly widely used technique is helpful. For more explanation of the methodology see Patrick E. Spencer's comments at his blog on "Gospels, Acts, and Hermeneutics" at gospelsandactshermeneutics.blogspot.com.

Some awareness of writer / reader issues in narrative criticism is important. The term 'implied author' alludes to the writer of this story and who he was, along with what was happening, at the moment of composition of the story. Living human beings are constantly changing along with their circumstances, but the writing of a story 'freezes' the author in the moment of composition. Thus intention, strategy in story telling etc. at that moment are a part of the analysis at a more technical level. This is related to but not the same as identification of the historical author of a document.

Another important term is 'implied reader.' The author of the story at the time of writing had in his mind a targeted audience; he was telling the story to an audience that he envisioned to be the initial readers of the document. That readership in the author's mind will dictate aspects of the telling of the story. He will include or exclude narrative details according to how much he thinks this readership already knows. On the other hand, the historical readers who include us today were not in the author's mind because he knew nothing about us. Often times tensions exist between the implied readers and the historical readers simply because the understanding of the circumstances behind the story is not the same, as well as interest in the details of the story.

It sometimes is charted out as follows: **HA / IA <TEXT> IR / HR**, with the terms being historical author / implied author/ implied reader / historical reader. The contribution of narrative criticism has largely been to sensitize the modern reader to many of the above dynamics going on in the telling of a story by an ancient writer. This sensitivity then can help us better understand the story in the text and to avoid drawing wrong conclusions about text meaning.

⁴GNT: 8.1 Σαῦλος δὲ ἦν συνευδοκῶν τῇ ἀναιρέσει αὐτοῦ.

Ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ διωγμὸς μέγας ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τὴν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὺμοις· πάντες δὲ διεσπάρησαν κατὰ τὰς



So we have a glimpse into this young Jewish Pharisee named Saul. He affirmed the execution of Stephen and began an ongoing, intensive persecution of Christians in the city of Jerusalem.⁵ This preview of Saul is necessary for understanding the point of scene one in 9:1-2. The length of time between Saul's launching of the persecution of believers in Jerusalem and his request to go to Damascus is not stated. Acts 8:4-40 shifts to the ministry of Philip at both Samaria and then in Gaza and finally from Azotus to Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. Since Luke has only minor interest in progression of time in his story, one should exercise great caution in projecting some amount of time between Stephen's death and the request to go to Damascus. It could have been a matter of weeks, months, and perhaps a year or more.⁶ The only indirect time reference in the text is the adverb ἔτι, meaning 'still,' in verse one. This suggests that some amount of time had passed between Stephen's death and the request to the high priest. And also that Saul's intense persecution of believers in Jerusalem had not diminished during that time.

In scene 1, Luke describes Saul's request for authorization papers from the high priest⁷ in Jerusalem that would enable him to arrest Christians in Damascus.⁸ Such papers were known as קְרָא רַגְרָא in the Hebrew.⁹ Numerous logistical questions arise regarding this, in part because the legal jurisdiction of the high priest would

χώρας τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ Σαμαρείας πλὴν τῶν ἀποστόλων. 2 συνεκόμισαν δὲ τὸν Στέφανον ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς καὶ ἐποίησαν κοπετὸν μέγαν ἐπ' αὐτῷ. 3 Σαῦλος δὲ ἐλυμαίνεται τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κατὰ τοὺς οἴκους εἰσπορευόμενος, σύρων τε ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας παρεδίδου εἰς φυλακὴν.

⁵In a subsequent depictions of this by Luke, Paul in a speech to Agrippa makes the following claim:

Acts 22:4-5, 4 I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

Acts 26:9-11, 9 Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 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. 11 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.

⁶Estimations can be produced from an overarching chronological projection of Paul's life, which we will attempt at the end of chapter three. But these remain only estimations and are without precise detail. The conversion of Paul (Acts 9) took place anywhere from one to five years after the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1). Thus sometime between 31 and 35 AD is the larger possible time frame for this segment from Stephen's death to Paul's departure for Damascus. But how long between these two events cannot be determined clearly.

⁷"HIGH PRIEST One in charge of the temple (or tabernacle) worship. A number of terms are used to refer to the high priest: the priest (Exod. 31:10); the anointed priest (Lev. 4:3); the priest who is chief among his brethren (Lev. 21:10); chief priest (2 Chron. 26:20); and high priest (2 Kings 12:10).

"Responsibilities and Privileges The high priesthood was a hereditary office based on descent from Aaron (Exod. 29:29-30; Lev. 16:32). Normally, the high priest served for life (Num. 18:7; 25:11-13; 35:25, 28; Neh. 12:10-11), though as early as Solomon's reign a high priest was dismissed for political reasons (1 Kings 2:27)....

In the period before the Maccabean revolt the high priesthood became increasingly political. Jason, a Hellenistic sympathizer, ousted his more conservative brother Onias III (2 Macc. 4:7-10, 18-20). Jason was, in turn, ousted by the more radically Hellenistic Menelaus who offered the Seleucid rulers an even larger bribe to secure the office (2 Macc. 4:23-26). With Menelaus the high priesthood passed out of the legitimate Zadokite line.

"The Maccabees combined the office of high priest with that of military commander or political leader. Alexander Balas, a contender for the Seleucid throne, appointed Jonathan Maccabee "high priest" and "king's friend" (1 Macc. 10:20). Simon Maccabee was, likewise, confirmed in his high priesthood and made a "friend" of the Seleucid King Demetrius II (1 Macc. 14:38). Temple and state were combined in the person of Simon who was both high priest and ethnarch (1 Macc. 15:1-2).

"The Romans continued the practice of rewarding the high priesthood to political favorites. During the Roman period, Annas (high priest A.D. 6-15) was clearly the most powerful priestly figure. Even when deposed by the Romans, Annas succeeded in having five of his sons and a son-in-law, Joseph Caiaphas (high priest A.D. 18-36/37) appointed high priests. Some confusion has resulted from NT references to the joint high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas (Luke 3:2). The passage is perhaps best understood as an acknowledgment of Annas as the power behind his immediate successors. Another possibility is that Annas retained the title of respect on the grounds that the high priesthood was for life. Ananias, one of Annas' sons, was the high priest to whom Paul was brought in Acts 23:2; 24:1."

[Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 762 - 764.]

⁸The high priest at this point in time was Joseph son of Caiaphas (Καϊάφας) who served as high priest from 18 to 36 AD. He had presided over the trial of Jesus. Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas by marriage to his daughter and ruled longer than any high priest in New Testament times. Caiaphas' term in office was recorded by the first-century Jewish historian Josephus. He was appointed in AD 18 by the Roman prefect who preceded Pilate, Valerius Gratus.

⁹Evidently this was something similar to what Paul mentions in 2 Cor. 3:1, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, *letters of recommendation* (συστατικῶν ἐπιστολῶν) to you or from you, do we?"

have been limited to Judea, and Damascus was in the Roman province of Syria, some 135 miles to the northeast of Jerusalem.¹⁰ The best assumption from the very limited information available is that such authorization would have been a letter commending Saul in his persecution of believers as having the full support of the high priest in Jerusalem and also a request that local synagogue leaders¹¹ cooperate fully with Saul in arresting the unrecanting Christians so they could be brought back to Jerusalem, as Luke states.

Luke's words imply that such authorization was given to Saul without delay or difficulty. This enabled him to make the several day journey from Jerusalem to Damascus to carry out his plans.

Of particular interest is Luke's characterization of the believing community as τῆς ὁδοῦ ὄντες, "being of the Way." This is a favorite label for Christians throughout Acts, as 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22; and 16:17; 18:25, 26 reflect. The term in figurative use, as here, implies a philosophical group, which would have been typical terminology for such in the ancient world. As a religious group label, the closest parallel comes from the literature of Qumran where the idea, as expressed in Aramaic, is a frequent label for the groups located near the Dead Sea.¹² The term specifies that a group is traveling together on a well defined path through life. Whether these believers in Damascus were native Jews of the city, or whether they had fled from Jerusalem as a consequence of the persecution of Saul mentioned in 8:1-3 is not clear. Probably both were included in the group.

Scene 2: Road leading to Damascus.

Acts 9:3-8. 3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

3 ἐν δὲ τῷ πορεύεσθαι ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐγγίξειν τῇ Δαμασκῶ, ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 4 καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; 5 εἶπεν δέ· Τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δέ· Ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις· 6 ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ εἴσελθε εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ λαληθήσεται σοι ὃ τί σε δεῖ



¹⁰“To issue such letters would presuppose authority on the part of the High Priest to require, or at least request, action by local Jewish communities in territory outside Palestine and under a different civil government. Whether such authority existed and, if it did, how it was exercised cannot be determined with certainty. 1 Macc. 15:16–21, a letter from the Roman Consul Lucius to Ptolemy of Egypt, seems to supply a precedent: it requires support for the Jews and adds ‘if any pestilent men have fled to you from their country, παράδοτε αὐτοὺς Σιμωνί τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ, ὅπως ἐκδικήσῃ αὐτοὺς κατὰ τὸν νόμον αὐτῶν.’ The same letter was sent, according to 1 Macc. 15:22, 23, to a variety of destinations. Josephus does not mention this letter, which, if written by the Consul Lucius Caecilius Metellus, must have been sent to Ptolemy VIII (= Euergetes II, 145–116 BC) and be dated in 142 BC, but does refer (*Ant.* 14:145) to a decree initiated by ‘Lucius Valerius, son of Lucius, the *praetor* (στρατηγός; the Latin VS has *consul*)’. This refers to Numenius, an envoy of the Jews; a similar reference to ‘Numenius and his party’ in 1 Macc. 15:15 strongly suggests that though Josephus places his decree in the time of Hyrcanus (if Hyrcanus I, probably c. 139 BC, if Hyrcanus II, c. 47 BC; see NS 1:195–7) both passages refer to the same decree. This gives the decree double attestation, but also diminishes our confidence in its dating and in its content, for the decree given by Josephus contains no reference to the right of extradition. In any case the latest date to which the decree can be assigned (if it ever was enacted) is about eighty years before the time of Saul, and there can be no certainty that such an arrangement would remain in force for so long in very disturbed times. There is moreover a contradictory piece of evidence in Josephus, *War* 1:474 (‘No other sovereign had been empowered by Caesar, as he [Herod] had, to reclaim a fugitive subject even from a state outside his jurisdiction’). Further, the evidence we have considered deals with relations between Jews and Romans. Any value it may possess will apply to the present case only if at the time in question Damascus was under Roman rule. This may have been so, but there is some ground for thinking that it was not; see on 9:23–25. It is however unnecessary to suppose that Paul’s actions carried, or needed, any authority beyond the confines of Judaism. Given the good will of the synagogues in Damascus it would be quite possible for Jews known to be Christians to ‘disappear’ (our own age is familiar with the phenomenon, and the word) and subsequently to find themselves in unwelcome circumstances in Jerusalem. The important historical question is that of the relation between the High Priest and Sanhedrin and provincial synagogues. It is unfortunately a question to which no precise answer can be given. ‘The extent to which Jews outside Judea were willing to obey the orders of the Sanhedrin always depended on how far they were favourably disposed towards it. It was only within the limits of Judea proper that it exercised direct power’ (NS 2:218). Known compliance with the policy of the Sanhedrin may have been a reason contributory to the choice of Damascus as a place in which to pursue anti-Christian action.” [C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark., 2004), 446-47.]

¹¹That a large Jewish population existed in Damascus at this time is evident from the Jewish historical Josephus who mentions the killing of some 18,000 Jews in the city by non-Jewish inhabitants there at an earlier time. (cf. *Jewish Wars* 2:561, 7:368, 2:560).

¹²For details see CD 20:18; 1:13; 2:6; 1 QS 9:17, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 8:12-15 etc.

ποιεῖν. 7 οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ εἰστήκεισαν ἐνεοί, ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς μηδένα δὲ θεωροῦντες. 8 ἡγέρθη δὲ Σαῦλος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἀνεωγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν· χειραγωγοῦντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσήγαγον εἰς Δαμασκόν.

In verses three through nine, the second scene takes place. The location is undefined beyond being on a road that went to the city of Damascus and was not very far from the city.¹³ But we do not know the exact spot where Saul met the risen Christ. The characters¹⁴ in this scene are Paul, the risen Christ, and the men who were accompanying Paul from Jerusalem to Damascus. The focus is on the interaction between Christ and Paul in the visionary experience. The traveling companions play a secondary role.



The scene begins with the flashing of a light from Heaven around Paul: ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. The impact of this is that Paul fell to the ground. And then a voice was heard calling out to Paul: καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ. The question put to Paul by the voice was simply: Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; Not understanding who the voice was, Paul then responded with a question: Τίς εἶ, κύριε; Then the voice replied by identifying itself and gave Paul instructions on what to do next: Ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις· ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ εἴσελθε εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ λαληθήσεται σοι ὃ τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν.

Luke notes that the traveling companions of Paul were speechless because of hearing sound but not seeing anyone: οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ εἰστήκεισαν ἐνεοί, ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς μηδένα δὲ θεωροῦντες. They didn't know what was happening. When Paul got back up from off the ground, he realized that he was blinded so that he couldn't see anything: ἡγέρθη δὲ Σαῦλος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἀνεωγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν. Consequently, the men led him into the city where for three days he couldn't see and didn't eat or drink anything: χειραγωγοῦντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσήγαγον εἰς Δαμασκόν. καὶ ἦν ἡμέρας τρεῖς μὴ βλέπων, καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲ ἔπιεν.

The narration of the event raises some issues needing explanation. The natural phenomena of light, lightning and fire are traditional motifs of a theophany¹⁵ (cf. Ezek. 1:28; Acts 2:3). The bright light and a voice signal the presence of the supernatural (cf. Acts 2:2-3). Why did Saul not instantly recognize who was speaking?¹⁶ Clearly he was not accustomed to experiencing such things. As a persecutor of the followers of Christ, he certainly was not expecting to see and talk with the risen Christ. The natural events had knocked him to the ground, further disorienting him. And then the question posed to him carried an unexpected assumption: the risen Christ was so identified with His followers that to persecute them was to persecute Him. In this, Luke makes an important theological point: Christ, even from Heaven, so identifies Himself with His own people that to harm them is to try to hurt Him. In the promise to be with His followers in Matth 28:20, Christ certainly keeps His word and stands

¹³In two speeches of Paul, other narrations of this are given by Luke in Acts:

Acts 22:6-11, 6 While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” 8 I answered, “Who are you, Lord?” Then he said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.” 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 I asked, “What am I to do, Lord?” The Lord said to me, “Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.” 11 Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

Acts 26:12-18, 12 With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. 14 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.” 15 I asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The Lord answered, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 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. 17 I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 18 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.”

¹⁴Sometimes theater terminology is employed in narrative critical circles. The individuals in the scene would then be labeled ‘actors.’

¹⁵Merriam-Webster online Dictionary: “a visible manifestation of a deity.”

¹⁶Paul’s question: Τίς εἶ, κύριε; In this kind of usage both inside and outside the New Testament the vocative case means “sir” and not “Lord,” which would falsely imply that Paul recognized who was speaking to him. Otherwise the question is pointless, as well as Jesus’ reply. “The reverential address Lord has its equivalent in the English ‘Sir.’ It is not a Christological title in this instance, because Saul does not yet know what this is all about. But the recognition of superior power is also implied in the address.” [Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 175-76.]

with His people through all their experiences, even those including suffering and persecution.

Christ's instructions to Paul, ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ εἴσελθε εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ λαληθήσεται σοι ὃ τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν, ("but get up and go into the city and it will be told you what you must do"), signal several things.¹⁷ Does this imply that Paul's 'conversion' happened in Damascus rather than on the road outside the city? This is doubtful since faith commitment implies obedience to follow Christ's instructions, which Paul certainly did. Only those theological tendencies which link the moment of baptism with the occurrence of salvation attempt to make this point. Also, the instructions signal not just a turning point in conversion but an implicit call to ministry -- which Paul spells out in Acts 26:16-18, along with Galatians 1:15-16. The combining of both conversion and calling into a single narrative is not uncommon in the biblical text, although not often experienced this way by believers today.

The traveling companions were left wondering what had happened. They heard τῆς φωνῆς, but didn't see who was speaking.¹⁸ One would assume that, on the way into Damascus, Paul explained to them what was happening. Given that Paul was blinded by the experience, they probably were glad not to have been the main target of the heavenly appearance. Being fellow Jewish persecutors of Christians, one wonders how they responded to Paul's explanation of what he had heard from the voice of Christ.

Scene 3: Inside the city of Damascus. A series of sub-scenes take place inside the city of Damascus.

First, in verse nine Paul enters the city to stay in a non-defined location.

Acts 9:9, For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

9 καὶ ἦν ἡμέρας τρεῖς μὴ βλέπων, καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲ ἔπιεν.

The place where Paul stayed is identified in scene three c. as Judas' home on Straight Street. But Luke withholds that information until deeper into the story. For three straight days Paul was not able to see, and he did not eat or drink anything. Probably, the abstaining from food and drink described by Luke implies fasting,¹⁹ al-

¹⁷One would want to note the different ways Luke narrates Paul's own description at this point:

Acts 22:10, I asked, "What am I to do, Lord?" The Lord said to me, "Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do."

Acts 26:16-18, 16 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. 17 I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles — to whom I am sending you 18 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.'

¹⁸Luke in 9:7 does something with the Greek that English translations have often failed to pick up in their translation. He says the men were ἀκούοντες τῆς φωνῆς that spoke to them from Heaven. Then later in 22:9 Luke says τὴν δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν τοῦ λαλοῦντός μοι, "but they did not hear the voice of the one speaking to me." Comparison of English translations seem to imply a contradiction between these two statements by Luke. But notice closely. The first says the men were hearing τῆς φωνῆς, while the second says they did not hear τὴν φωνὴν. Same noun, φωνή, but in two different grammar functions. The first is Genitive case, while the second is Accusative case. The Greek verb ἀκούω implies a subtle shift of meaning when the case of the direct object changes. In the Genitive case, the hearing is simply of sound without any meaning, but in the Accusative case it is hearing sound that has meaning. Thus the men heard a sound but had no idea what was being said to Paul by the risen Christ.

¹⁹"1. *The Meaning of the Word.* *nēstis* means "one who has not eaten," "who is empty," then "who fasts." *nēsteiō* means "to be without food or hungry," but mostly "to fast." The noun *nēsteia* means "suffering hunger," usually "fasting."

"2. *Fasting in Antiquity.* Fasting is found in all religions. It is the temporary abstention from nourishment on religious grounds. At first it is more common among the Greeks than the Romans, but it spreads over the whole of the ancient world. Fear of demons plays a role in it; it is also seen as a means of preparing for dealings with deity. The mourning fast is due to fear of demonic infection. Egyptian priests fast before entering the sanctuary. Fasting also prepares the way for ecstatic revelations. There is little relation between fasting and ethics in antiquity.

"3. *Fasting in the OT and Judaism.* The OT uses various terms for fasting. Many aspects of OT fasting are the same as elsewhere. There is a mourning fast for the dead that expresses sorrow (1 Sam. 31:13). Moses fasts before receiving the commandments (Ex. 34:28), as does Daniel before receiving his visions (Dan. 9:3). Fasting also expresses submission to God, whether in the case of individuals (2 Sam. 12:16ff.) or the people (Judg. 20:26 etc.). Prayer accompanies fasting (Jer. 14:12), especially penitential prayer (1 Sam. 7:6). The one who fasts often takes the posture of a mourner (cf. 1 Kgs. 21:27). Fasts last one day (Judg. 20:26); three days in Esth. 4:16. In the seven-day fast of 1 Sam. 31:13 the actual fasting is only during the day. The only cultic fast is on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29ff.). Special fasts are set up to remember the fall of Jerusalem (Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19). The prophets protest against the view that purely external fasting gains a hearing with God (cf. Jer. 14:12; Is. 58:1ff.). For them true fasting is a bowing down of the soul that leads to moral action. Judaism finds an important place for fasting. Apocalyptists prepare for revelation by it. Fasting confirms vows and prayer. It has efficacy with God for forgiveness, healing, and exorcism, although true fasting necessarily involves repentance. The devout make the second and fifth days of the week into additional fasts, but there is never fasting on special feast days, days of preparation, or the sabbath. Longer fasts of up to 40 days occur, and much stress is laid on gestures of mourning in fasting. The Pharisees, the disciples of the Baptist, and the Therapeutae all observe fasts. Philo extols *nēsteia* as ascetic restraint. Rules are set up for the public fasts, and individual fasting tends to replace sacrifice after the destruction of the temple, since it grants expiation, guarantees a divine hearing, and produces sanctity. Yet there are warnings that penitence is also required, and students are advised against excessive fasting.

though Luke does not use any of the terms for fasting: νήστις, νηστεύω, νηστεία. Thus Paul entered into a period of disciplined focus on spiritual matters as a traditional Jewish method to make sense of what had happened to him on the road.

Second, the scene shifts in verses ten through sixteen to the house of Ananias in the city.

Acts 9:10-16, 10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” 11 The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” 13 But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” 15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

10 Ἦν δὲ τις μαθητῆς ἐν Δαμασκῶ ὀνόματι Ἀνανίας, καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ὄραματι ὁ κύριος· Ἀνανία. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· Ἴδου ἐγώ, κύριε. 11 ὁ δὲ κύριος πρὸς αὐτόν· Ἀναστάς πορεύθητι ἐπὶ τὴν ῥύμην τὴν καλουμένην Εὐθεῖαν καὶ ζήτησον ἐν οἰκίᾳ Ἰούδα Σαῦλον ὀνόματι Ταρσεά, ἰδοὺ γὰρ προσεύχεται, 12 καὶ εἶδεν ἄνδρα ἐν ὄραματι Ἀνανιαν ὀνόματι εἰσελθόντα καὶ ἐπιθέντα αὐτῷ χεῖρας ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃ. 13 ἀπεκρίθη δὲ Ἀνανίας· Κύριε, ἤκουσα ἀπὸ πολλῶν περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου, ὅσα κακὰ τοῖς ἀγίοις σου ἐποίησεν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ· 14 καὶ ὧδε ἔχει ἐξουσίαν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων δῆσαι πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομά σου. 15 εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· Πορεύου, ὅτι σκευὸς ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἐθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἰῶν τε Ἰσραὴλ, 16 ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑποδείξω αὐτῷ ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν.

Luke shifts from a focus on Paul to give his readers a brief depiction of Ananias who was to play an important role in Paul's spiritual transformation. Ananias is identified as a disciple (τις μαθητῆς) who lived in Damascus.²⁰ Whether he was a permanent resident there, or a refugee from Jerusalem, is not clear, although the subsequent reference in Acts 22:12 would suggest the former. God arranged the meeting of the two men through appearing to both through dreams (ὄραματι) that contained some instruction for both.

The divine appearance to Ananias follows an Old Testament pattern reminiscent of that in 1 Samuel 3, where Samuel heard God calling him. But here it is Christ as Lord who is speaking to Ananias. Once Ananias acknowledges the divine presence with “Here I am, Lord” he is given instructions on what to do: “Get up and go to the street called Straight,²¹ and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At



Straight Street in modern Damascus

4. *Fasting in the NT.* Jesus opens his ministry with a 40-day fast corresponding to that of Moses. But Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant has already received God's revelation, and he fasts in order to be equipped to confirm his messianic dignity and power. He seems not to engage in special fasting during his ministry, but he would naturally observe the public fasts, and he does not forbid his hearers to fast. For Jesus, however, fasting is service of God and a sign of true conversion. It must be done in secret and not accompanied by open signs of mourning. His disciples do not fast like those of the Baptist (Mk. 2:18ff.), for the presence of the Messiah means rejoicing as at the presence of a bridegroom. The new age is an age of joy. Only the age of waiting (which will begin again after his death) is a time of fasting (cf. Jn. 16:20). The eschatological message of Jesus transcends fasting, but since there is a gap between the dawn of salvation and its consummation there is room for fasting, not as a pious work, but as the sign of an inner attitude. The sayings about the patch and the wineskins are linked to the question of fasting in Mk. 2:18ff. This link preserves the insight that the new age has come as an age of joy. Yet fasting goes hand in hand with prayer in Acts 13:2–3 and 14:23, when missionaries are sent out and elders are appointed. The epistles do not mention fasting; it is not listed even in Heb. 13:16.

5. *Fasting in the Early Church.* Voluntary fasting on specific days returns in the early church (Wednesday and Friday in *Did.* 8.1). The Easter fast is laid on all Christians in the second century (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24. 12ff.). Fasting before baptism also comes into vogue (*Did.* 7.4), as does fasting before communion. Reasons given for fasting are to strengthen prayer, to prepare for revelation, to express sorrow, to help the poor with the food saved, and to reconcile penitents with God. Criticisms of fasting are based on the OT prophets (*Barn.* 3. 1ff.), and there is a tendency to subordinate the rite to inwardness and to the ethical (*Hermas Similitudes* 5.3.5ff.). But the early church shows little awareness of Jesus' distinctive approach to fasting." [J. BEHM, IV, 924–35] [Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 632-33.]

²⁰Note also the additional information about Ananias: **Acts 22:12**, **A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there,**

²¹"This street can still be seen today, though somewhat farther to the north from the ancient street, and is now known as the Darb-el-Mostakim. It runs in an east-west direction, and in Paul's day it had colonnades on both sides and large gates at both ends."¹⁹⁷ [John B. Polhill, vol. 26, *Acts*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman

this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” Ananias is told where to go and that Paul is expecting him to enable Paul regain his vision. Ananias’ reluctance is not based on what the Lord told him to do, but on the reputation of Paul as a persecutor of Christians: “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” Thus news about Paul’s coming to Damascus had come to the Christian community in advance of Paul’s arrival in the city, and it was creating substantial apprehension. The Lord became more forceful in his instructions to Ananias with more detail: “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” Thus Ananias’ duty is to help Paul recover his sight, and the Lord will take care of the rest.

Some observations about the characters in this scene. Ananias is one of those biblical characters who surface in relation to one particular event and we learn nothing more about them. He is made known to us only through Luke’s narrative in Acts 9 and 22 in relation to Paul’s conversion and baptism.²² Several later church traditions suggest activities and further identification, but few if any of these can be substantiated.²³ Paul in his writings never mentions Ananias. Yet in this one glimpse we learn of a disciple with a deep love for the Lord and a willingness to take risks in order to be obedient to Christ. Consequently his obedience was significantly used of God to position the apostle Paul for ministry.

Also important is the first use in Acts of an alternative term to designate Christians; in 9:13, Ananias calls the believers in Jerusalem τοῖς ἁγίοις σου, “your saints.” The designation will surface again 9:32, 41 and 26:10, and thus reflects Luke’s limited way of referring to Christians, and especially Jewish Christians.²⁴ The label stresses Christians as those set apart in dedication to God and thus living a life of righteousness consistent with the character of God. In Acts the label especially designates Jewish Christians in Luke’s usage.

God used the vehicle of dreams to communicate His message to both Ananias and Paul. Luke in his Gospel and in Acts alludes to dreams / visions as a significant means of divine revelation, more than any other writer in the New Testament.²⁵ The term used here ὄραμα simply means ‘something seen.’²⁶ In a day before the New Testament scriptures existed, divine communication of specific information beyond the religious principles in the Hebrew Bible had to be communicated through alternative means. Beyond the vehicle of communication, the most important point is the insight into how well God planned out the meeting between these two strangers. The Lord was in full control of the situation and worked in amazing fashion to bring these two men together.

Third, the next shift in verses seventeen through nineteen a, the scene shifts the residence where Paul was staying, identified as the house of a Judas that was located on “Straight Street” in the city.

Acts 9:17-19a, 17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” **18** And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then

Publishers, 2001), 236.]

²²This man should not be confused with another Christian in Jerusalem by the same name who along with his wife Sapphira deceived the apostles about a gift and paid for it with their lives. See Acts 5:1-11 for details.

Also a third man with the name Ἀνανίας was Ananias, the son of Nedebeaus, the high priest under Claudius and Nero ca. 47–58 AD. Paul appears before him claiming innocence (Acts 23:1–10), and Ananias orders one of the attendants to strike him on the mouth.

²³“According to tradition, Ananias was martyred in Eleutheropolis.² Hyam Maccoby suggested he was the father of Joshua ben Hananiah. Ananias is also listed by Hippolytus of Rome and others as one of the Seventy Disciples whose mission is recorded in Luke 10.” [“Ananias of Damascus,” *Wikipedia.org* online]

²⁴“The term ἅγιος is only rarely used by Luke of Christians in Acts (cf. 9:32, 41 and 26:10), and it is possible that the term refers specifically to Jewish Christians, in particular Jewish Christians (originally) from Jerusalem, which is the way Paul uses the term in several of his letters (cf. Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8:4, and possibly in Eph. 1:1; 2:19 of Jewish Christians in general).” [Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 318.]

²⁵“Besides the Book of Revelation, visions in the New Testament are concentrated in the writings of Luke. Gabriel appeared to announce the births of John (Luke 1:8-20) and Jesus (Luke 1:26-37). Ananias and Paul received visions to prepare Paul for baptism (Acts 9:10-19). Likewise, Peter and Cornelius received visions to prepare them for Peter’s ministry among Gentiles (10:3-35). Angelic visions freed Peter from prison (12:9), called Paul to a European ministry (16:9), and encouraged Paul in his ministry at Corinth (18:9). So the visions of Luke-Acts announce God’s plans for the immediate future or empower the church for the present.” [William T. Arnold, “Vision(s),” *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*]

²⁶“**24.2 ὄραμα, τος** n: (derivative of ὁράω ‘to see,’ 24.1) that which is seen — ‘something seen, sight.’²⁴ ὁ δὲ Μωϋσῆς ἰδὼν ἐθαύμαζεν τὸ ὄραμα ‘Moses was amazed by what he saw’ Ac 7:31.” [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 276.]

he got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

17 ἀπήλθεν δὲ Ἀνανίας καὶ εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, καὶ ἐπιθείς ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας εἶπεν· Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ὁ κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με, Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὄφθεις σοι ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἧ ἤρχου, ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃς καὶ πλησθῆς πνεύματος ἁγίου. 18 καὶ εὐθέως ἀπέπεσαν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ὡς λεπίδες, ἀνέβλεψέν τε καὶ ἀναστὰς ἐβαπτίσθη, 19 καὶ λαβῶν τροφὴν ἐνίσχυσεν.

In this scene, interaction is depicted between Ananias and Paul. Ananias obediently finds Judas’ home and meets Paul for the first time. Curiosity on our part leads us to wonder what kind of conversation they must have had upon meeting. We are informed only of a single statement from Ananias: “**Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**” In Luke’s narration to this point, the readers were already aware of Ananias’ mission to help Paul regain his sight. But now Ananias adds the filling of the Holy Spirit in his ministry to Paul. Paul is reminded again of who spoke to him on the road leading into Damascus, the Lord Jesus. Note that Luke carefully chooses the passive voice verbs for regaining sight and filling with the Spirit: ἀναβλέψῃς καὶ πλησθῆς πνεύματος ἁγίου. This stresses that both the healing and the filling were done by God, and not by Ananias. The touch of Ananias was the catalyst that enabled the divine power to effect the healing and the filling, although the subsequent narrative may imply that the filling of the Spirit was connected to Paul’s baptism rather than Ananias laying hands on Paul. Luke does not specify when the coming of the Spirit on Paul took place.²⁷ Paul’s boldness in preaching Christ in the city indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life, as is described in vv. 19b-25.

When Ananias touched Paul with his hands, the healing of his eyes took place: “**And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored.**” Physical contact through laying on of hands (ἐπιθέντα αὐτῷ τὰς χεῖρας) is a significant means for a healing miracle in Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 9:18; 28:8. Among ancient Jews with rigidly practiced rules of purity, the physical touch of another person took on enormously greater significance than it has in the modern world. Every physical contact represented huge religious risk, for if either person was ritually unclean the touch automatically contaminated the other person, thus making him religiously unclean as well. The regulations for ritual cleansing from impurities were involved and very complicated; failure to follow them was fatal to one’s relationship with God.²⁸ Here two strangers, one a rigidly strict Pharisee practicing the most extreme of ritual purity regulations, came in physical contact with one another. Just to allow Ananias to touch him meant that Paul already was loosening up his thinking substantially.

After the healing and recovery of sight, Paul was baptized (ἀναστὰς ἐβαπτίσθη). The text does not specify directly who baptized him, although the general assumption seems to be that Ananias did. The turning of Paul to Christ was now complete. His transforming encounter with the risen Christ on the road to the city now culminated in public identification with Christ as an open profession of faith in Jesus as his Savior. These three plus days had brought about totally unexpected results both in Paul’s expectation and for the believers in Damascus. And even for the Jewish community at large in Damascus, as Luke indicates in 9:21: “**All who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”**”

The continuation of the narrative in Damascus extends to include verses nineteen b through twenty-five with two sets of sub-scenes first in the city at large (vv. 19b-22) and then at the city wall (vv. 23-25). But these are beyond our focus on Paul’s conversion, and so we will not analyze them.

General observations. Although unsatisfying in some ways to a modern reader because of the lack of



²⁷Luke does not seem to have a rigid understanding of the filling of the Spirit and of water baptism, and the connection between the two. In Acts 10:44, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his friends occurred while Peter was still speaking and before their baptism. This is a substantially different sequence than the one described with Ananias and Paul. Other patterns are also present in Acts. See the concordance listing for baptism in the book of Acts for details.

²⁸“That purity is required of Israel is axiomatic within the Hebrew Bible, but distinct strategies of defining, achieving and maintaining purity were developed. The best known and most comprehensive strategy is the priestly scheme represented in the book of Leviticus, and most discussions understandably begin at that point (see DJG, Clean and Unclean). But that picture is to be supplemented by the alternative strategies of other circles within Israel. Ezekiel, Leviticus and Deuteronomy provide patterns of understanding which were classic within the understanding of Israel and formative for several groups within Judaism during the time the NT emerged.” [Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).]

specific details, Luke develops his characters in this story by supplying limited details only as they serve his objective. When new individuals are introduced such as Ananias we don't learn much about them. Many of the characters remain unnamed and appear only momentarily. Luke tells us only as much as he feels we need to know in order to get his main points across. And especially from a modern biography standpoint we learn almost nothing about the inner motivations of any of his characters. Luke's view is centered on affirming through human actions what God was up to. And we get the clear message that God has the ability to so move in the life of even one persecuting the Christian faith that this person can be dramatically transformed to become one of the greatest promoters of that very faith. Everything in the narrative is guided by this objective. And this is the central lesson to be learned from Acts 9:1-19a.

2.1.1.2 Paul's First Recollection

Secondary Source:

Acts 22:1-16

1 "Brothers and fathers, listen to the defense that I now make before you."

2 When they heard him addressing them in Hebrew, they became even more quiet. Then he said: 3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. 4 I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

6 "While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 8 I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" Then he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting." 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 I asked, "What am I to do, Lord?" The Lord said to me, "Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do." 11 Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

12 "A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, 13 came to me; and standing beside me, he said, "Brother Saul, regain your sight!" In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. 14 Then he said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; 15 for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name."

22.1 Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες, ἀκούσατέ μου τῆς πρὸς ὑμᾶς νυνὶ ἀπολογίας.

2 Ἀκούσαντες δὲ ὅτι τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ προσεφώνει αὐτοῖς μᾶλλον παρέσχον ἡσυχίαν. καὶ φησὶν· 3 Ἐγὼ εἶμι ἀνὴρ Ἰουδαῖος, γεγεννημένος ἐν Ταρσῷ τῆς Κιλικίας, ἀνατεθραμμένος δὲ ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ παρὰ τοὺς πόδας Γαμαλιήλ, πεπαιδευμένος κατὰ ἀκρίβειαν τοῦ πατρῷου νόμου, ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τοῦ θεοῦ καθὼς πάντες ὑμεῖς ἐστε σήμερον, 4 ὃς ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν ἐδίωξα ἄχρι θανάτου, δεσμεύων καὶ παραδιδούς εἰς φυλακὰς ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, 5 ὡς καὶ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς μαρτυρεῖ μοι καὶ πᾶν τὸ πρεσβυτέριον· παρ' ὧν καὶ ἐπιστολὰς δεξάμενος πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς εἰς Δαμασκὸν ἐπορευόμην ἄξων καὶ τοὺς ἐκεῖσε ὄντας δεδεμένους εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἵνα τιμωρηθῶσιν.

6 Ἐγένετο δὲ μοι πορευομένῳ καὶ ἐγγίζοντι τῇ Δαμασκῷ περὶ μεσημβρίαν ἐξαίφνης ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περιεστράψαι φῶς ἱκανὸν περὶ ἐμέ, 7 ἔπεσά τε εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς λεγούσης μοι· Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; 8 ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπεκρίθην· Τίς εἶ, κύριε; εἶπέν τε πρὸς ἐμέ· Ἐγὼ εἶμι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὃν σὺ διώκεις. 9 οἱ δὲ σὺν ἐμοὶ ὄντες τὸ μὲν φῶς ἐθεάσαντο τὴν δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν τοῦ λαλοῦντός μοι. 10 εἶπον δέ· Τί ποιήσω, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν πρὸς με· Ἀναστὰς πορεύου εἰς Δαμασκόν, κάκεῖ σοι λαληθήσεται περὶ πάντων ὧν τέτακταί σοι ποιῆσαι. 11 ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἐνέβλεπον ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκείνου, χειραγωγούμενος ὑπὸ τῶν συνόντων μοι ἦλθον εἰς Δαμασκόν.

12 Ἀνανίας δὲ τις ἀνὴρ εὐλαβῆς κατὰ τὸν νόμον μαρτυρούμενος ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν κατοικούντων Ἰουδαίων, 13 ἐλθὼν πρὸς ἐμέ καὶ ἐπιστὰς εἶπέν μοι· Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ἀνάβλεψον· κἀγὼ αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἀνέβλεψα εἰς αὐτόν. 14 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· Ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν προεχειρίσατό σε γνῶναι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, 15 ὅτι ἔση μάρτυς αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὧν ἐώρακας καὶ ἤκουσας. 16 καὶ νῦν τί μέλλεις; ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

The second of three narrations on Paul's conversion is found in Acts 22. In both the second and third accounts, the perspective shifts from Luke telling the story to Paul telling the story through a defense speech. But one must remember that this is Luke presenting a speech that Paul gave. By its very nature, it is but a summation and Lukan interpretation of what Paul had said many years earlier; it is not a word for word reproduction

of what Paul said to the crowd.²⁹ Note that Paul spoke in Hebrew / Aramaic (cf. Acts 21:40), while Luke records the speech in Greek. Reading the speech takes a little over one minute, but Paul spoke for quite some time to the crowd that day in Jerusalem.³⁰

The issues of sources for Luke's re-construction of Paul's speech to the crowd have some importance to the understanding of the text and content of the speech.³¹ The extreme view of this is reflected by Hans Conzel-

29 The rhetorical pattern of Paul's speech here has been accessed from a literary perspective against the backdrop of ancient rhetoric and patterns of composing speeches, especially defense speeches. Richard Provo in the Hermeneia commentary series proposes the following analysis:

- A. V. 3*. From Diaspora to Jerusalem
- B. Vv. 4–5a*. Persecution of movement
- C. V. 5b*. Paul's travel from Jerusalem to Damascus
- D. V. 6–11*. Vision near Damascus
- E. Vv. 12–13*. Ananias heals Paul
- F. Vv. 14–15*. Paul learns of his mission
- E'. Vv. 16*. Baptism (illumination)
- D'. Vv. 17–18a*. Vision in the temple
- C'. V. 18b*. Command to depart from Jerusalem
- B'. Vv. 19–20*. Persecution
- A'. V. 21*. From Jerusalem to Diaspora 16

[Richard I. Pervo and Harold W. Attridge, *Acts: A Commentary on the Book of Acts*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 561.]

This is set in the form of an ancient chiasmus with the center point of the speech reached with point F in vv. 14-15. Consequently, the understood Lukan point in the speech is Paul's discovery of his mission to the Gentiles. Some portions overlap with the Acts 9 narrative but several new features are inserted into this speech. It is that mission to the Gentiles which has brought Paul into this difficulty at the temple in Jerusalem and it will enrage the crowds at the end of the speech to demand Paul's execution.

Although this assessment is subject to weaknesses that have been noted by other scholars, it does provide a creative way of reading the text so that new insights can be gleaned from the speech.

³⁰When speeches show up both in the Old and New Testaments, as well as in ancient literature generally, they will never record the exact words that were given orally in the actual delivery of the speech. Several background aspects must not be overlooked. Ancient speeches were never written out "in full manuscript" form in advance to delivery. If the speaker had enough advanced notice he might carry some notes with him when giving the speech. But quite often the situation of speech giving was spontaneous and the speaker had to give a speech without advanced notice, such as the situation in Acts 22 as Luke describes in the narrative introduction to this speech of Paul's in Acts 21:37-40. Those who later produce a written version of the speech have to draw upon available sources of information in order to compose their version of the speech. Hopefully they were present when the oral delivery of the speech was made, but if not -- more often the situation -- then questioning individuals present and hopefully the speaker provides the basis for their attempt to reconstruct the speech. Our modern world is so conditioned to recordings being made to speeches by important people so that we can put ourselves into original the listening audience by listening to an audio recording or even better to a video recording of the delivery of the speech. Plus quite often written copies of the speech are distributed in advance of its delivery. None of these kinds of options were possible in the ancient world.

Added to these factors is also a different idea about the role and function of written speeches in a piece of literature. As discussed already in chapter one, presenting the speeches of significant individuals was an important component of ancient history writing. But the history writer was not bound by strict guidelines of recording exactly what the speech giver had spoken in oral delivery. History as an important sub-discipline of philosophy served the purpose of the philosopher in advocating his own view of life and reality. Including speeches from the past by influential individuals was guided by the shaping of the written version of the speeches as a support of the philosopher's own ideology. Thus whatever the original speech giver had said in oral delivery was re-shaped to suit the objectives of the history writer / philosopher.

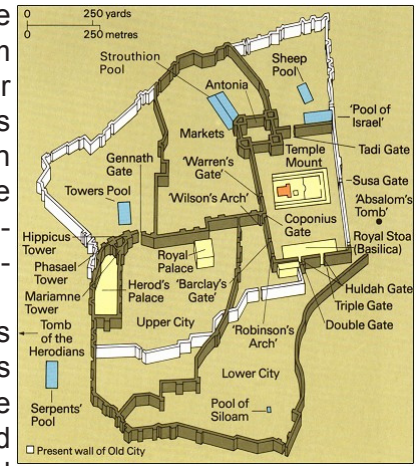
Quite clearly Luke as a writer of the history of early Christianity was guided by standards in place during his lifetime, and not by modern standards of history writing. In Luke's world, Dionysius of Halicarnassus articulated the standards of history writing better than anyone else. Thus the speeches of Peter and Paul recorded in Acts are summaries of what these two Christian leaders had delivered orally, and Luke only highlights aspects that serve his own purposes of demonstrating the continued presence from Jesus' ministry of the Spirit of God in the ministries of these two leaders who symbolized Jewish and Gentile Christian interests. This is one essential understanding in order to grasp why both of Paul's speeches (chaps 22 & 26) that include a recounting of his conversion experience are not only different from one another but also different from the Acts 9 account itself.

³¹One important aspect of such an issue is Luke's statement at the beginning of the Gospel, which covers both the Gospel and Acts: "1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 *just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word*, 3 *I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first*, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed." [Luke 1:1-4] Clearly Luke claims to have investigated his sources carefully both oral and written before using them to tell his story of Jesus and of the early church.

mann: “Like the preceding speeches, the entire defense speech³² given before the people is Luke’s creation.”³³ On the other side of the interpretive spectrum is the view that Luke drew heavily from Paul as the two traveled together in their endeavors. If the common assessment of the so-called “We Sections” of Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16) is correct,³⁴ then Luke was in Jerusalem with Paul when this arrest took place, but whether or not he was present in the temple when the uproar happened cannot be determined. Clearly Luke had conversations with Paul in Jerusalem and certainly during the two plus year stay in Caesarea Philippi afterwards.

Setting. Again looking at the text from a narrative critical perspective is helpful. Clearly *the narrative introduction* to the speech is contained in Acts 21:26-40 with two segments: 1) Paul is in the temple to complete his Nazarite vow (vv. 26-32); and 2) the Roman soldiers rescue of Paul from the angry crowd in the outer court of the temple (vv. 33-40). This material, especially the second segment, sets the stage for Paul to address the crowd from the entrance to the Fortress of Antonia as they stood near the outer court of the temple. Paul impresses the Roman tribune with his excellent command of the Greek language (v. 37), but then will address the Jewish crowd in Hebrew / Aramaic³⁵ (v. 40; 22:2).³⁶

The narrative conclusion is 22:22-29 where the crowd interrupts Paul’s speech when the apostle mentions being sent by God to the Gentiles (v. 21). The uproar of the crowd endangers Paul’s life and necessitates Roman soldiers to again rescue him. They took him inside the Fortress of Antonio for interrogation to try to find out what was causing such anger by the Jewish crowd outside in the temple court. With standard procedure for interrogating prisoners, they prepared to first flog him before beginning the interrogation. Paul turns the tables on them by announcing his Roman citizenship. This meant that not only could they be subject to severe punishment for flogging an unconvicted Roman citizen, but that they had already seriously violated Roman law by putting Paul in chains.



³²“This speech and the comparable ones before Felix (24:2–23) and Festus with Agrippa (26:2–32) follow an ancient pattern for defenses. There is first an introduction (technically called the *exordium*), whose purpose is to render the audience well disposed, attentive, and receptive. This is followed by the body of the speech, which usually contains three elements: the statement of facts, the proof, and the refutation. Then the final part is the *peroration*, or closing word, which brings the whole defense to a conclusion.” [Chalmer Ernest Faw, *Acts, Believers church Bible commentary* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 243.]

³³Hans Conzelmann, Eldon Jay Epp and Christopher R. Matthews, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 186.

³⁴This is one of the standard signals taken to mean that Luke was a traveling companion of Paul and thus an eye-witness to the events that happened in Paul’s travels from Philippi onward on the second missionary journey to the time of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome.

³⁵τῆ Ἑβραϊδὶ (ιδίᾳ, P74 A) διαλέκτῳ. Cf. 22:2; 26:14. Probably Aramaic is intended. ‘That Aramaic and not Hebrew was really the language of the people is proved by Aramaic proverbs and sentences which occur not only in the Midrashim, but also in the Mishna, and first and foremost by rabbinical Hebrew itself, which is either an aramaicized Hebrew or a hebraicized Aramaic, and so presupposes Aramaic to have been the language of the country’ (Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua* (1929), 16).” [C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The international critical commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 1027-28.]

³⁶“This form of the conversion story is undoubtedly suited to a Jewish audience (see pp. 1144f. for the adaptation of virtually the same material to a different audience in ch. 26); whether it was suited to the particular Jewish audience that Paul had before him is not so clear. He is accused (21:28, 29) of teaching all men everywhere against the people, the Law, and the (Holy) Place, and of having brought Greeks into the Temple and thus of profaning it. In the background lurks the report that he teaches all the Jews among the Gentiles apostasy from Moses, saying that they should not circumcise their children or walk in accordance with the (Mosaic) customs (21:21). None of these matters is touched upon, except in the assertion that Paul is a Jew, that he is (or has been) zealous for God, and was educated by the great Pharisee, Gamaliel, also that it was in the Temple that he received the commission to act as a missionary to the Gentiles. The immediate charge that he had brought Greeks into the Temple receives no notice at all. To say this is not to say (as some do) that the speech is irrelevant. On this occasion and throughout the rest of the book Paul insists that he is a Jew, and to make this point as Luke wishes to make it, it was necessary to show that the conversion was within and not from Judaism (so e.g. Schmithals 202, arguing further that Luke was concerned to combat the Pauline *Irrlehrer*). In this sense the opening verses were relevant. Relevant also is the conversion itself, told as an event within Judaism: supernatural encounters must be taken seriously. It was no use denying that Paul had lived in the Gentile world and in close relation with Gentile communities, but this was not his choice; he himself had told God that he would be an effective witness to Jews (vv. 19, 20). It was God who had overruled this and sent him to the Gentiles (vv. 18, 21).” [C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The international critical commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 1031-32.]

Segment:	Acts 9	Acts 22
1. Saul the Pharisee	vv. 1-2: 1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.	vv. 3-5: 3 I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. 4 I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.
2. Saul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus	vv. 3-8: 3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 <i>But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.</i> " 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open , he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.	vv. 6-11: 6 While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 8 I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" Then he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting." 9 <i>Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.</i> 10 I asked, "What am I to do, Lord?" The Lord said to me, "Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do." 11 Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light , those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.
3. Saul meets Ananias in Damascus	vv. 9-19a: 9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." 11 The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.	vv. 12-16: 12 A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, 13 came to me; and standing beside me , he said, "Brother Saul, regain your sight!" In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. 14 Then he said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; 15 for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.'

In the chart, the following is highlighted for comparison purposes: the **red bold/italic text** signals words only in one of the two accounts. The *italic text* represents common concepts in the same general sequence of listing. The *italic blue text* refers to common concepts that are introduced at different sequence points.

Between these two narrative texts comes Paul's speech in 22:1-21. The speech by literary genre is a 'defense speech'.³⁷ It falls into several segments: 1) Paul as Pharisee (vv. 3-5); 2) the Damascus road experi-

³⁷For a complete listing and some discussion of these in Acts, see "Defense Speeches," cranfordville.com at <http://cranfordville.com/NT-genre.htm#Defense>.

ence (vv. 6-11); 3) the meeting with Ananias (vv. 12-16); 4) the vision in the temple at Jerusalem (vv. 17-21). Only segments one through three overlap with the Acts 9 narrative. Segment four is completely new. And some difference of details in the first three segments from their parallels in Acts 9 are present. Since our focus is on Paul's conversion, we will concentrate on those portions of the text. The other segments which are unconnected will be given some attention because they are a part of the larger context. But they also lay beyond our main concern, only secondary attention will be given to them.

Comparison of the similarities and the distinctives of each text is the main point of our analysis, rather than doing a detailed exegesis of this passage similar to that with the Acts 9 text. Through this comparison we can better understand not only the two perspectives being presented, but also reasons for these differences that need to be examined in order to grasp what Luke is attempting to communicate not only to his initial readers but also to a wider readership that would follow.

The comparison³⁸ of these two accounts reveals several interesting perspectives. The above chart attempts to highlight similarities and differences between the two accounts, which form a starting point to the analysis.³⁹ We will go through the three overlapping segments of the story making relevant comparisons.

Scene 1. Saul the Pharisee.

Acts 9:1-2 (NRSV)	Acts 9:1-2 (SBL-GNT)	Acts 22:3-5 (NRSV)	Acts 22:3-5 (SBL-GNT)
1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.	9.1 Ὁ δὲ Σαῦλος ἔτι ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου, προσελθὼν τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ 2 ἤτήσατο παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολὰς εἰς Δαμασκὸν πρὸς τὰς συναγωγὰς, ὅπως εἴαν τινὰς εὕρῃ τῆς ὁδοῦ ὄντας, ἀνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, δεδεμένους ἀγάγῃ εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ.	3 I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. 4 I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.	3 Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἀνὴρ Ἰουδαῖος, γεγεννημένος ἐν Ταρσῶ τῆς Κιλικίας, ἀνατετραμμένος δὲ ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ παρὰ τοὺς πόδας Γαμαλιήλ, πεπαιδευμένος κατὰ ἀκρίβειαν τοῦ πατρῷου νόμου, ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τοῦ θεοῦ καθὼς πάντες ὑμεῖς ἐστε σήμερον, 4 ὃς ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν ἐδίωξα ἄχρι θανάτου, δεσμεύων καὶ παραδιδούς εἰς φυλακὰς ἀνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, 5 ὡς καὶ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς μαρτυρεῖ μοι καὶ πᾶν τὸ πρεσβυτέριον· παρ' ὧν καὶ ἐπιστολὰς δεξάμενος πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς εἰς Δαμασκὸν ἐπορευόμην ἄξων καὶ τοὺς ἐκέῖσε ὄντας δεδεμένους εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἵνα τιμωρηθῶσιν.

Very clearly more details are included in the second account than in the first account.

Acts 22:3 comes as Paul's oral introduction of himself to the Jewish crowd. The point is made that although born in Tarsus, Paul is a Jew and has been trained to be a Pharisee by Gamaliel, one of the most respected scribes of that day. Gamaliel had died about 50 AD but his legacy was still fresh in the minds of the

Additionally, the speech is introduced as a defense speech in 22:1, "Brothers and fathers, listen to *the defense* that I now make before you" (Ἀνδρες ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες, ἀκούσατέ μου τῆς πρὸς ὑμᾶς νυνὶ ἀπολογίας.).

³⁸“The account in ch. 22 is adapted to the Jewish audience to which it is addressed. The High Priest and the council of elders are invoked to testify to Paul's Jewish zeal (22:5); Jesus becomes Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος (22:8); Ananias is described not as a disciple but as a devout observant of the Law, respected by all the local Jews (22:12), and he speaks not in the name of the Lord Jesus but in that of the God of our fathers (22:14); it is in the Temple that Paul in a vision receives his instructions (22:17); he takes the opportunity of giving his Jewish credentials as a persecutor (22:19, 20); only when he claims to have been sent by God to the Gentiles does he provoke dissent (22:21, 22)” [C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, The international critical commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 1031.]

³⁹I'm deliberately not including the third account in Acts 26 at this point in order to underscore the experience of the early readers who did not anticipate the third narrative until getting to that later passage. In the next segment of the chapter we will look at the third narration of his conversion from the background of the first two texts. This will provide the completed picture of the Lukan perspective on Paul's conversion. Most commentaries treat all three narratives simultaneously and thus lose the perspective of the reader of the book of Acts in gradually learning more and more about Paul's conversion.

people listening to Paul speaking less than ten years later. The defense speech nature of the text dictates the appropriateness of such a beginning introduction to the speech, whereas it would not have been particularly important in a simple event narration such as Acts 9. One should also note that when Paul spoke to the Roman tribune (21:39) he gave more emphasis to his connection to Tarsus: “I am a Jew, *from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city*; I beg you, let me speak to the people.” This was appropriate for that setting, just as the emphasis on his Jewish heritage better fits the setting of speaking to the crowd of Jewish people. This had an additional level of importance since Paul came out of a Diaspora Jewish background, rather than having been born and raised in Jerusalem.

We have already addressed the issue of “*but brought up in this city*” (ἀνατεθραμμένος δὲ ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ) in chapter one (cf. pp. 21ff), and we drew the conclusion that he came to Jerusalem as an older teenager to study with Gamaliel. The educational experience in Jerusalem focused on learning the Torah both in the scriptural aspects and the scribal traditions aspects. Although the label is not directly mentioned, the orientation of Paul’s study was the viewpoint of the Pharisees⁴⁰ as is implied in the phrase: “*educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today*” (πεπαιδευμένος κατὰ ἀκρίβειαν τοῦ πατρῶου νόμου, ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τοῦ θεοῦ καθὼς πάντες ὑμεῖς ἐστε σήμερον). The last phrase καθὼς πάντες ὑμεῖς ἐστε σήμερον should be understood broadly as a complementary expression of the general desire to obey the Torah rather than as a subtle labeling of the crowd as being Pharisees.

Paul’s indication of persecuting the church in 22:4-5a compares favorably to Luke’s statement in 9:1.

22:4-5a, *I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison*, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me.

ὅς ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν ἐδίωξα ἄχρι θανάτου, δεσμεύων καὶ παραδιδούς εἰς φυλακὰς ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, 5 ὡς καὶ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς μαρτυρεῖ μοι καὶ πᾶν τὸ πρεσβυτέριον

9:1, *Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*,

Ὁ δὲ Σαῦλος ἐτι ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου,

No essential difference exists between the two accounts.⁴¹ But distinctives are present. The believing community is designated as “*this Way*” (ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν) by Paul, but as “*the disciples of the Lord*” (τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου) by Luke. Paul’s label in the speech reflects a characterization of Christians as a religious movement, not necessarily unlike both the Pharisees and Sadducees among others inside Judaism. Paul’s persecution of them was based on seeing Christians as heretics inside Judaism, not as another religion in competition to Judaism. Luke’s earlier characterization in Acts 9 draws off the connecting of this group of people to Jesus as is reflected in Stephen’s defense speech in Acts 7. Both Luke and Paul affirm specific actions of persecution, as does Paul in some of his letters (cf. Gal. 1:13; Phil 3:6a; 1 Cor 15:9). Paul added the statement that the Sanhedrin could vouch for the correctness of his claims.⁴² This was in spite of a different high priest now leading the Sanhedrin; Paul felt that his reputation some two plus decades earlier would still be remembered by these leaders.

The request for authorization to travel to Damascus in 22:5b and 9:2 corresponds favorably to one another.

22:5b, *From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.*

παρ’ ὧν καὶ ἐπιστολὰς δεξάμενος πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς εἰς Δαμασκὸν ἐπορευόμην ἄξων καὶ τοὺς ἐκεῖσε ὄντας δεδεμένους εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἵνα τιμωρηθῶσιν.

9:2, *asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

ἤτησατο παρ’ αὐτοῦ ἐπιστολὰς εἰς Δαμασκὸν πρὸς τὰς συναγωγὰς, ὅπως ἐάν τις εὔρη τῆς ὁδοῦ ὄντας, ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας, δεδεμένους ἀγάγη εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ.

⁴⁰The belief system of the Pharisees stood out in stark contrast to that of the Sadducees. Their focus was on obedience to the Torah as the key means of gaining Heaven in eternity, and avoiding Hell. The Sadducees were skeptical of an afterlife, and focused on gaining God’s blessings in this life.

⁴¹For references in Acts to Paul’s persecution of Christians see 7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1, 21; 22:3-5a, 19-20; 26:11.

⁴²The high priest referenced here is not certain, since we don’t know the exact dating of this speech. Probably it came sometime after 56 AD, which means that Ananias, son of Nedebeaus (47-59) was high priest at the time (cf. Acts 23:3; 24:1). This would have been a different person from Joseph Caiaphas (18-36) who was high priest when Paul had sought permission to go to Damascus with recommendation letters from the high priest, in addition to being the son-in-law of Annas.

Ἀνανίας, high priest 47-59 is easily confused with Ἄννας, son of Seth, high priest (6-15) mentioned in John 18:24, Lk. 3:2; Acts 4:6. Although deposed in 15 AD by procurator Gratus he remained influential through gaining appointments by the Romans to the high priest office for five of his sons and his son-in-law Caiaphas, all of whom functioned largely under his control through the rest of his life until his death likely around 40 AD.

Since Paul has already identified the believers as “the Way” (τῆς ὁδοῦ), he doesn’t repeat the label here, while Luke does use the label in 9:2.⁴³ While Luke speaks of men and women to be brought back to Jerusalem, Paul simply speaks of individuals being brought back for punishment. This additional point of punishment would have resonated with the angry crowd in the temple court.

Scene 2. Saul meets Jesus on the road outside Damascus. This is the second scene in the sequence of recounting Paul’s conversion in both narratives.

Acts 9:3-8 (NRSV)	Acts 9:3-8 (SBL-GNT)	Acts 22:6-11 (NRSV)	Acts 22:6-11 (SBL-GNT)
3 Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” 5 He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open , he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.	3 ἐν δὲ τῷ πορεύεσθαι ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐγγίξειν τῇ Δαμασκῶ, ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 4 καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; 5 εἶπεν δέ· Τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δέ· Ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις· 6 ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ εἴσελθε εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ λαληθήσεται σοι ὃ τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν. 7 οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδεύοντες αὐτῷ εἰστήκεισαν ἐνεοί, ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς μηδένα δὲ θεωροῦντες. 8 ἠγέρθη δὲ Σαῦλος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἀνεωγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν· χειραγωγοῦντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσήγαγον εἰς Δαμασκόν.	6 While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” 8 I answered, “Who are you, Lord?” Then he said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.” 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. 10 I asked, “ What am I to do, Lord? ” The Lord said to me, “Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.” 11 Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light , those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.	6 Ἐγένετο δὲ μοι πορευομένῳ καὶ ἐγγίξοντι τῇ Δαμασκῶ περὶ μεσημβρίαν ἐξαίφνης ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περιεστράψαι φῶς ἱκανὸν περὶ ἐμέ, 7 ἔπεσά τε εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς λεγούσης μοι· Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; 8 ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπεκρίθην· Τίς εἶ, κύριε; εἶπέν τε πρὸς ἐμέ· Ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὃν σὺ διώκεις. 9 οἱ δὲ σὺν ἐμοὶ ὄντες τὸ μὲν φῶς ἐθεάσαντο τὴν δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν τοῦ λαλοῦντός μοι. 10 εἶπον δέ· Τί ποιήσω, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν πρὸς με· Ἀναστὰς πορεύου εἰς Δαμασκόν, κάκει σοι λαληθήσεται περὶ πάντων ὧν τέτακται σοι ποιῆσαι. 11 ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἐνέβλεπον ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκείνου , χειραγωγούμενος ὑπὸ τῶν συνόντων μοι ἦλθον εἰς Δαμασκόν.

Here the two narratives are very similar to one another, although some distinctives are present in each account.

Both accounts depict Paul traveling toward Damascus from Jerusalem and nearing the city when the bright light suddenly interrupted his travels. The light is described in 9:3 as φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (light from Heaven) and in 22:6 as φῶς ἱκανὸν (bright light). The action of the light is described almost the same way: ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν (suddenly shined upon him) in 9:3, while ἐξαίφνης ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περιεστράψαι...περὶ ἐμέ (suddenly from heaven shined...around me) in 22:6. The reaction to the burst of light is described almost the same way: καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἤκουσεν φωνὴν λέγουσαν αὐτῷ in 9:4, and ἔπεσά τε εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς λεγούσης μοι in 22:7.

⁴³**3. c. of the whole way of life fr. a moral and spiritual viewpoint, the way, teaching** in the most comprehensive sense (Lucian, Hermot. 46 ὁδ. of the doctrine of a philosophical school Just., D. 39, 2 ἀπολείποντας τὴν ὁδ. τῆς πλάνης; 142, 3 διὰ ταύτης τῆς ὁδοῦ), and specif. of teaching and manner of life relating to Jesus Christ (SMcCasland, JBL 77, '58, 222–30: Qumran parallels) κατὰ τὴν ὁδ. ἢν λέγουσιν αἵρεσιν according to the Way, which they call a (heterodox) sect **Ac 24:14**. ἐάν τις εὖρη τῆς ὁδ. ὄντας if he should find people who belonged to the Way **9:2**. ὁδ. κυρίου, θεοῦ of teaching relating to Jesus and God’s purpose **18:25f**. κακολογεῖν τὴν ὁδ. ἐνώπιον τοῦ πλήθους **19:9**. ταύτην τὴν ὁδ. διώκειν persecute this religion **22:4**. ἐγένετο ταραχος περὶ τῆς ὁδ. there arose a disturbance concerning the Way **19:23**. τὰ περὶ τῆς ὁδ. (the things) concerning the teaching **24:22**. ἡ ὁδὸς τ. ἀληθείας of the true Christian teaching (in contrast to that of dissidents vs. 1) **2 Pt 2:2** (Ode Sol 11:3). Of the way of love καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν ὁδ. a far better way **1 Cor 12:31**. ἡ ὁδ. τῆς δικαιοσύνης ApcPt 7:22; 13:28. Likew. the pl. (En 104:13 μαθεῖν ἐξ αὐτῶν [τ. βιβλίων] πάσας τ. ὁδοὺς τῆς ἀληθείας) τὰς ὁδοὺς μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ my Christian directives (i.e. instructions, teachings) **1 Cor 4:17**.—OBecker, D. Bild des Weges u. verwandte Vorstellungen im frühgriech. Denken '37; FNötscher, Gotteswege u. Menschenwege in d. Bibel u. in Qumran, '58; ERepo, D. Weg als Selbstbezeichnung des Urchr., '64 (but s. CBurchard, Der 13te Zeuge, '70, 43, n. 10; JPathrapankal, Christianity as a ‘Way’ according to the Acts of the Apostles: Les Actes des Apôtres, Traditions, redaction, théologie, ed. JKremer '79, 533–39 [reflects Is 40:3 and the emphasis on 777 in CD and 1QS: the ‘dynamism of Christianity’ is ‘Way of Life’]).—B. 717; 720. DELG. M-M. EDNT. TW. Sv.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 692.]

The next sequence of conversation between Paul and Jesus is depicted very similar to one another:

9:4b-5. Σαούλ Σαούλ, τί με διώκεις; 5 εἶπεν δέ· Τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὁ δέ· Ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις·

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” 5 He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting...”

22:7b-8. Σαούλ Σαούλ, τί με διώκεις; 8 ἐγὼ δὲ ἀπεκρίθην· Τίς εἶ, κύριε; εἶπέν τε πρὸς ἐμέ· Ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὃν σὺ διώκεις.

“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” 8 I answered, “Who are you, Lord?” Then he said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.”

The real distinctive is the way Jesus identifies Himself. In 9:5 He simply identifies Himself by name, whereas in 22:8 “of Nazareth” is added. This would have more clearly identified Jesus in the minds of the crowd, since the name Ἰησοῦς was commonly used in Palestine at that time.

Paul’s speech injects another exchange between himself and Jesus that is present in Acts 9 but not emphasized the same way. In 22:10, Paul asks the Lord what he is to do and Jesus gives instructions as an answer to Paul’s questions. These instructions are included in the initial response of Jesus identifying Himself in 9:6.

22:10. εἶπον δέ· Τί ποιήσω, κύριε; ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν πρὸς με· Ἀναστὰς πορεύου εἰς Δαμασκόν, κάκει σοι λαληθήσεται περὶ πάντων ὧν τέτακταί σοι ποιῆσαι.

I asked, “What am I to do, Lord?” The Lord said to me, “Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.”

9:6. ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ εἰσελθε εἰς τὴν πόλιν, καὶ λαληθήσεται σοι ὃ τί σε δεῖ ποιεῖν.
But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”

With slightly different words, the instructions contain the same basic idea that Paul is to go into the city where he will receive additional instructions. The identification of the city as Damascus in 22:10, unlike in 9:6, is understandable given the audience listening to Paul’s speech.

The participation of Paul’s traveling companions in this event is described by both accounts, although in a slightly different sequence.

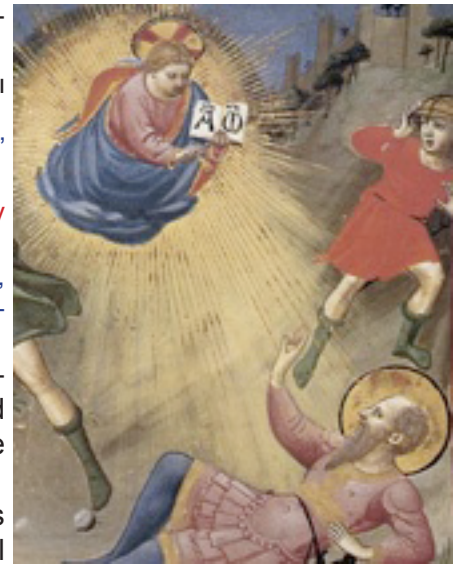
9:7, οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες οἱ συνοδευόντες αὐτῷ εἰστήκεισαν ἐνεοί, ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς μηδένα δὲ θεωροῦντες.
The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.

22:9, οἱ δὲ σὺν ἐμοὶ ὄντες τὸ μὲν φῶς ἐθεάσαντο τὴν δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν τοῦ λαλοῦντός μοι.
Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

More variation of details surface here, than in the other segments. None of the men traveling with Paul are identified by name and after leading Paul into Damascus they completely drop from the narrative without further mentioning. We have no way of knowing how they responded to this event. Two points of seeming contradiction surface in comparison of these two accounts. In 9:7 they saw no one (μηδένα θεωροῦντες), but in 22:9 they saw the light (τὸ φῶς ἐθεάσαντο). And in 9:7 they heard the voice (ἀκούοντες τῆς φωνῆς), while in 22:9 they did not hear the voice (τὴν δὲ φωνὴν οὐκ ἤκουσαν τοῦ λαλοῦντός μοι). The tension here between these two accounts has troubled scholars for a long time.

As background one should note that in both accounts a fundamental contrast is set up using the same grammar structure in Greek, μὲν... δέ, which heightens the contrast between two parallel elements. In 22:9, the contrast is between the men seeing the light but not hearing the voice. But in 9:7, the contrast is between the men hearing the voice but not seeing any person. Thus the tension between what they did or didn’t see (ἐθεάσαντο/ θεωροῦντες) is less because although they saw the bright light they were not able to identify it with a person.

The greater tension seems to lie in what they did or didn’t hear. The identical direct object of the hearing action, τὴν φωνὴν / τῆς φωνῆς, the voice, heightens the tension between the two accounts. But one should careful notice the different spelling of the direct objects. First, τὴν φωνὴν is the accusative case spelling, while τῆς φωνῆς is the genitive case spelling. The most likely explanation of this difference lies in the classical Greek pattern of the Greek verb for hearing, ἀκούω. Generally when the genitive case object was used with the verb, the idea was that of hearing a sound without any meaning, just noise. But when the accusative case object was used, the sense was that of hearing sound with meaning. Thus in 9:7 the idea is that the men heard a voice talking but had no idea what it was saying, while in 22:9 the sense is that they did not hear a voice that they could understand. This seems to be the difference between the two statements, and if so, then no real contradiction between the



two is present. It is just two different ways to assert that the traveling companions had no comprehension of the content of conversation taking place between Jesus and Paul. What Jesus said to Paul pertained only to Paul and the others were not privy to it.

The final segment of both narratives describes Paul being led blinded by the men into the city of Damascus. The perspectives of both accounts are very similar.

9:8, ἡγέρθη δὲ Σαῦλος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, **ἀνεωγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ** οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν· χειραγωγοῦντες δὲ αὐτὸν εἰσήγαγον εἰς Δαμασκόν.

Saul got up from the ground, and **though his eyes were open**, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

22:11, ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἐνέβλεπον **ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκείνου**, χειραγωγούμενος ὑπὸ τῶν συνόντων μοι ἦλθον εἰς Δαμασκόν.

Since I could not see **because of the brightness of that light**, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

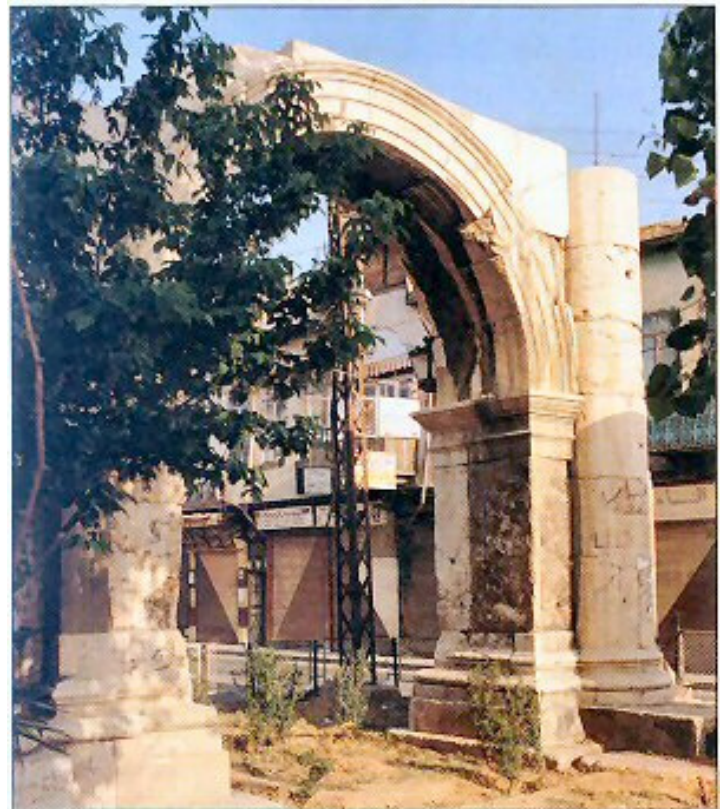
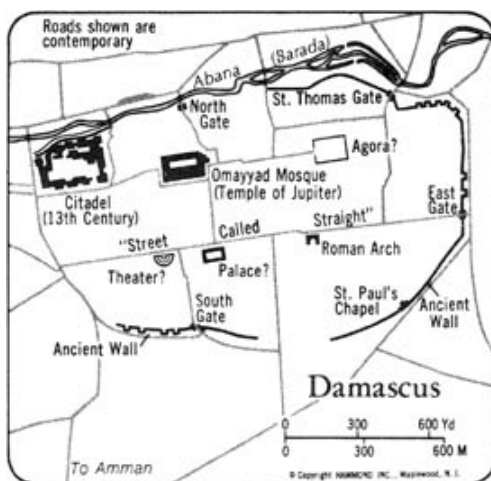
Again the essence of both accounts is very similar, but several distinctives surface as well. In Paul's account, the standing up from the ground action is a part of Jesus' instruction to him in 22:10, whereas in 9:8 Paul just stood up without being told to do so. This account is also a little more detailed in mentioning that he stood up "from the ground" (ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς). Two different verbs for standing up are used, but have the same basic meaning: ἡγέρθη in 9:8, but ἀναστὰς in 22:10. The situation of Paul's blindness is described somewhat differently. In 9:8, when he opened his eyes he couldn't see anything (ἀνεωγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν). In 22:11 the brightness of the light was the cause of him not seeing (ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἐνέβλεπον ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκείνου). The subtle play on words here with τῆς δόξης escapes most translators. The Greek word suggests the supernatural nature of the bright light as the divine presence lay at the heart of not being able to see. Paul in his speech was strongly equating Jesus with the divine presence and glory of God.

The actions of the traveling companions in taking Paul's hand and leading him into the city is described in very similar ways with the same essential meaning. Missing from both accounts is an indication of how they were supposed to know where to go in Damascus. Neither accounts supplies this information, but with the instructions given to Ananias next, they evidently found their way to the home of a Judas on Straight Street in the city and were where the Lord intended them to go.

Scene 3. Saul meets Ananias in Damascus. Just a quick glance at the different number of verses contained in the two accounts signals that some real distinctives are going to be present between these two narratives Paul's meeting with Ananias.

Roman arch at entrance to Straight Street

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Acts 9:9-19a (NRSV)	Acts 9:9-19a (SBL-GNT)	Acts 22:12-16 (NRSV)	Acts 22:12-16 (SBL-GNT)
<p>9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. 10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." 11 The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." 17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.</p>	<p>9 καὶ ἦν ἡμέρας τρεῖς μὴ βλέπων, καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲ ἔπιεν. 10 Ἦν δὲ τις μαθητὴς ἐν Δαμασκῶ ὀνόματι Ἀνανίας, καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ὁράματι ὁ κύριος· Ἀνανία. ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· Ἰδοὺ ἐγώ, κύριε. 11 ὁ δὲ κύριος πρὸς αὐτόν· Ἀναστάς πορεύθητι ἐπὶ τὴν ῥύμην τὴν καλουμένην Εὐθεΐαν καὶ ζήτησον ἐν οἰκίᾳ Ἰούδα Σαῦλον ὀνόματι Ταρσέα, ἰδοὺ γὰρ προσεύχεται, 12 καὶ εἶδεν ἄνδρα ἐν ὁράματι Ἀνανίαν ὀνόματι εἰσελθόντα καὶ ἐπιθέντα αὐτῷ χεῖρας ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃ. 13 ἀπεκρίθη δὲ Ἀνανίας· Κύριε, ἤκουσα ἀπὸ πολλῶν περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου, ὅσα κακὰ τοῖς ἀγίοις σου ἐποίησεν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ· 14 καὶ ὧδε ἔχει ἐξουσίαν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων δῆσαι πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους τὸ ὄνομά σου. 15 εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· Πορεύου, ὅτι σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἐθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἱῶν τε Ἰσραὴλ, 16 ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑποδείξω αὐτῷ ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν. 17 ἀπήλθεν δὲ Ἀνανίας καὶ εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, καὶ ἐπιθείς ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας εἶπεν· Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ὁ κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με, Ἰησοῦς ὁ ὀφθεῖς σοι ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἣ ἦρχου, ὅπως ἀναβλέψῃς καὶ πλησθῆς πνεύματος ἁγίου. 18 καὶ εὐθέως ἀπέπεσαν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ὡς λεπίδες, ἀνέβλεψέν τε καὶ ἀναστάς ἐβαπτίσθη, 19 καὶ λαβὼν τροφήν ἐνίσχυσεν.</p>	<p>12 A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, 13 came to me; and standing beside me, he said, "Brother Saul, regain your sight!" In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. 14 Then he said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; 15 for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.'</p>	<p>12 Ἀνανίας δὲ τις, ἀνὴρ εὐλαβὴς κατὰ τὸν νόμον, μαρτυρούμενος ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν κατοικούντων Ἰουδαίων, 13 ἐλθὼν πρὸς με καὶ ἐπιστάς εἶπέν μοι· Σαοὺλ ἀδελφέ, ἀνάβλεψον. κάγω αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἀνέβλεψα εἰς αὐτόν. 14 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν προεχειρίσατό σε γνῶναι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, 15 ὅτι ἔση μάρτυς αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὧν ἐώρακας καὶ ἤκουσας. 16 καὶ νῦν τί μέλλεις; ἀναστάς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἀμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.</p>

Here the detailed narrative is found in chapter nine, while the highly abbreviated account is in chapter twenty-two. The logic of the speech setting would suggest the reason for the shorter account in Paul's speech. An angry crowd would not be much interested in substantial details about this meeting and would want to know primarily why it took place, much more than exactly what happened. Luke then weaves Paul's speech to highlight the main points of the meeting. One the other hand, Luke's intention in chapter nine is to illustrate the first physical contact between Paul and a representative of the Christian community in a positive, affirming manner. This meeting brought to completion the conversion change of Paul from Pharisee to Christian, and thus needed to be emphasized. Paul doesn't dismiss such a transformation but can explain it to the crowd much simpler and easier. And, of course, given the summary nature of Luke's composition of these speeches we don't actually know what all Paul may have said to the group.

The most dramatic difference is that in Paul's speech nothing is mentioned regarding the conversation between the Lord and Ananias reflecting Ananias' hesitancy to go to where Paul was staying. An indirect hint at it is contained in the instructions given to Paul in 22:14-15 that effectively summarizes 9:15-16 by Ananias. But

in Acts 9, it is the Lord speaking to Ananias, while in Acts 20 it is Ananias speaking to Paul. Several phrases are very similar to one another:

Acts 9:15, *he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel;*

Πορεύου, ὅτι σκευὸς ἐκλογῆς ἐστίν μοι οὗτος τοῦ βαστάσαι τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐνώπιον ἐθνῶν τε καὶ βασιλέων υἱῶν τε Ἰσραήλ,

Acts 22: 14-15, *The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; 15 for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard*

ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν προεχειρίσατό σε γνῶναι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰδεῖν τὸν δίκαιον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, 15 ὅτι ἔση μάρτυς αὐτῷ πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὧν ἑώρακας καὶ ἤκουσας.

The messages of both the Lord and Ananias make the same essential point that Paul has been chosen by God to provide a witness to the entire world. More Jewish tones are seen in Paul's speech in 22:14 with an emphasis on seeing and hearing "the Righteous One" linked to knowing God's will. And such a Jewish tone was appropriate to Paul's speaking to a Jewish audience.

The one missing element from the speech account in Acts 22 is the emphasis in Acts 9:16 about Paul's experience of suffering: "I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑποδείξω αὐτῷ ὅσα δεῖ αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου παθεῖν). But this aspect wasn't important for Paul's defense of himself to the Jewish crowd. Of course, such information was not especially relevant to the Jewish audience listening to Paul speak. And probably not something that Paul took a lot of delight in hearing himself. But he did discover out of experience the spiritual value of suffering as he shares in 2 Cor. 12:7b-10,

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. 8 Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, 9 but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

In Acts 9, Ananias is described as *τις μαθητῆς ἐν Δαμασκῷ*, "a certain disciple in Damascus." But in Acts 22, his Jewish piety is stressed by the label *τις ἀνὴρ εὐλαβῆς κατὰ τὸν νόμον μαρτυρούμενος ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν κατοικούντων Ἰουδαίων*, "a certain man devout according to the law, given a good testimony by all the Jews living around him." No contradiction between these two characterizations is present since he was a Jewish Christian. The highlighting of the Jewish piety is more appropriate to Paul's speaking to an angry Jewish crowd. The speech account doesn't mention Ananias touching Paul as a vehicle of the miraculous healing, while the Acts 9 account does.

In Acts 9:18, Luke simply mentions that Paul was baptized at the end of a three day fast after arriving in Damascus. He doesn't say explicitly who baptized him, although the text suggests that Ananias did. However, in Acts 22:16, Paul says that Ananias encouraged him with the following words: "And now why do you delay? Get up, be baptized, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name" (καὶ νῦν τί μέλλεις; ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ). This is more detailed than the simple statement by Luke in Acts 9:18, καὶ ἀναστὰς ἐβαπτίσθη, "after getting up, he was baptized."

Why did Paul -- and ultimately Luke -- include the additional details in the speech? *First*, it served the setting of the speech well to stress that the command to be baptized came through the lips of a pious and believing Jew, Ananias, rather than through some visionary experience. *Second*, although different voice forms of the verb βαπτίζω are used -- Aorist passive ἐβαπτίσθη in 9:18, but aorist middle (imperative) βάπτισαι in 22:16, the sense of both forms is that baptism was performed by another person, and was not a 'self-baptizing' action by the candidate as was the usual case for Jewish proselyte baptism during that era. Ananias, the Jewish Christian, baptized Paul. The Greek middle voice has the range of possible meanings that include the idea, "get yourself baptized," and this is the sense here. *Third*, the association of having one's sins washed away (ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου) in connection to baptism is unique to Luke's perspective in the baptismal passages in Acts outside of 2:38.⁴⁴ But given the Jewish heritage of certain temple rituals of ceremonial cleansing being connected to

⁴⁴Acts 2:38, 41 - 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and *be baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...." 41 So those who welcomed his message *were baptized*, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Acts 8:12-13, 36, 38 - 12 But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they *were baptized*, both men and women. 13 Even Simon himself believed. After *being baptized*, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.... 36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from *being baptized*?"...38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and *Philip baptized him*.

Acts 9:18 - Then he got up and *was baptized*,

water, the speech setting makes it more understandable why Paul would make such a connection in his speech. One should note, contrary to most Bible translations ignoring it, that the aorist participle phrase ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ unquestionably asserts prior action; that is, “after having called upon His name get your sins washed away.” A faith commitment is the basis of the cleansing of sins, and the faith commitment is the basis of being baptized. But Luke does underscore that official identification with the Christian movement which openly affirms that the spiritual action of divine forgiveness comes through water baptism. The baptism does not accomplish this cleansing, but it clearly affirms it to everyone observing the candidate being baptized.⁴⁵

General observations on the comparison. To me, one of the most striking differences is how much adjustment of the details of both narratives takes place in consideration of the setting and objectives of each narrative. The speech narrative in Acts 22 reflects great sensitivity to where the angry Jewish crowd was emotionally as they listened to Paul speak. The very distinctive slant -- and summation of the Acts 9 narrative -- of Paul’s speech means that Paul understood where his audience was emotionally and religiously. And thus he highlighted aspects of his conversion experience that they could best understand and relate to. He avoided as much as possible inflammatory language that would ‘set them off’ until the mentioning of being sent by God to Gentiles became necessary.

What we can’t answer with precision is how much of this slanting of Paul’s speech goes back to the apostle, and how much of it goes to Luke the history writer. Obviously it is not a verbatim recording of Paul’s speech because he delivered it in Aramaic but Luke recorded it in Greek. Clearly Paul spoke more than the two minutes it takes to read the speech in Acts 22, so Luke is greatly condensing down a much longer speech in its original delivery. Given standardized guidelines for formulating written speeches in ancient history, it is clear that Luke has not only chosen to emphasize the aspects sensitive to the original angry Jewish audience hearing the speech but that he also has emphasized points consistent with his objectives of painting a certain picture of the apostle in his leadership of the Christian movement in its non-Jewish orientation. Paul was fully capable of defending his conversion to Christianity even to a hostile Jewish audience, and could do so very skillfully and diplomatically. But he would not compromise reporting essential elements of that experience when it came to God’s calling to minister to non-Jews.

There is a great deal that we can learn from this when we are called upon to recount our conversion experience. Primarily, it is that we understand our listeners and relate our experience of coming to God in terms more understandable to our listeners who have not had such an encounter with God. Also, we can learn the importance of being diplomatic and non-threatening to our audience. And at the same time to be uncompromising on the core elements of what we have experienced in coming to God. Such is the example of Paul’s speech to an angry Jewish audience, as Luke summarizes it for us.

2.1.1.3 Paul’s Second Recollection

Secondary Source:

Acts 26:1-20

1 Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself: 2 “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, 3 because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg of you to listen to me patiently.

4 “All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in

Acts 10:47-48 - Then Peter said, 47 “Can anyone withhold *the water for baptizing these people* who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” 48 So he ordered them to *be baptized* in the name of Jesus Christ.

Acts 13:23-24 - 23 Of this man’s posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised; 24 before his coming John had already proclaimed *a baptism of repentance* to all the people of Israel.

Acts 16:14-15, 32-33 - 14 A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. 15 When she and her household *were baptized*, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us

32 They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family *were baptized* without delay.

Acts 18:8 Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and *were baptized*.

Acts 22:16 - And now why do you delay? Get up, *be baptized*, and have your sins washed away, calling on his name.’

⁴⁵Compare Peter’s words in 1 Peter 3:21, “And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”

Jerusalem. 5 They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. 6 And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, 7 a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! 8 Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

9 “Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 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. 11 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.

12 “With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. 14 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.” 15 I asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The Lord answered, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 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. 17 I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 18 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.”

19 “After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 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.”

26.1 Ἀγρίππας δὲ πρὸς τὸν Παῦλον ἔφη· Ἐπιτρέπεται σοι ὑπὲρ σεαυτοῦ λέγειν. τότε ὁ Παῦλος ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα ἀπελογεῖτο· 2 Περὶ πάντων ὧν ἐγκαλοῦμαι ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων, βασιλεῦ Ἀγρίππα, ἡγήμαι ἐμαυτὸν μακάριον ἐπὶ σοῦ μέλλον σήμερον ἀπολογεῖσθαι, 3 μάλιστα γνώστην ὄντα σε πάντων τῶν κατὰ Ἰουδαίους ἐθῶν τε καὶ ζητημάτων· διὸ δέομαι μακροθύμως ἀκοῦσαί μου.

4 Τὴν μὲν οὖν βίωσίν μου τὴν ἐκ νεότητος τὴν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς γενομένην ἐν τῷ ἔθνει μου ἐν τῇ Ἱεροσολύμοις ἴσασι πάντες Ἰουδαῖοι, 5 προγινώσκοντές με ἄνωθεν, ἐὰν θέλωσι μαρτυρεῖν, ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην αἴρεσιν τῆς ἡμετέρας θρησκείας ἔζησα Φαρισαῖος. 6 καὶ νῦν ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι τῆς εἰς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν ἐπαγγελίας γενομένης ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἕστηκα κρινόμενος, 7 εἰς ἣν τὸ δωδεκάφυλον ἡμῶν ἐκτενεῖα νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν λατρεῦον ἐλπίζει καταντῆσαι· περὶ ἧς ἐλπίδος ἐγκαλοῦμαι ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων, βασιλεῦ· 8 τί ἄπιστον κρίνεται παρ’ ὑμῖν εἰ ὁ θεὸς νεκροὺς ἐγείρει;

9 Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ἔδοξα ἐμαυτῷ πρὸς τὸ ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου δεῖν πολλὰ ἐναντία πρᾶξι· 10 ὃ καὶ ἐποίησα ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις, καὶ πολλοὺς τε τῶν ἁγίων ἐγὼ ἐν φυλακαῖς κατέκλεισα τὴν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων ἐξουσίαν λαβὼν, ἀναιρουμένων τε αὐτῶν κατήνεγκα ψῆφον, 11 καὶ κατὰ πάσας τὰς συναγωγὰς πολλακίς τιμωρῶν αὐτοῦς ἠνάγκαζον βλασφημεῖν, περισσῶς τε ἐμμαινόμενος αὐτοῖς ἐδίωκον ἕως καὶ εἰς τὰς ἔξω πόλεις.

12 Ἐν οἷς πορευόμενος εἰς τὴν Δαμασκὸν μετ’ ἐξουσίας καὶ ἐπιτροπῆς τῆς τῶν ἀρχιερέων 13 ἡμέρας μέσης κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν εἶδον, βασιλεῦ, οὐρανόθεν ὑπὲρ τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου περιλάμπαν με φῶς καὶ τοὺς σὺν ἐμοὶ πορευομένους· 14 πάντων τε καταπεσόντων ἡμῶν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἤκουσα φωνὴν λέγουσαν πρὸς με τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ· Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις; σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζεις. 15 ἐγὼ δὲ εἶπα· Τίς εἶ, κύριε; ὃ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν· Ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις· 16 ἀλλὰ ἀνάστηθι καὶ στήθι ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου· εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ὤφθην σοι, προχειρίσασθαί σε ὑπηρετήν καὶ μάρτυρα ὧν τε εἶδες με ὧν τε ὀφθήσομαί σοι, 17 ἐξαιρούμενός σε ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν, εἰς οὓς ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω σε 18 ἀνοῖξαι ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν, τοῦ ἐπιστρέψαι ἀπὸ σκοτῶν εἰς φῶς καὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ Σατανᾶ ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, τοῦ λαβεῖν αὐτοὺς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ κληρὸν ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πίστει τῇ εἰς ἐμέ.

19 Ὅθεν, βασιλεῦ Ἀγρίππα, οὐκ ἐγενόμην ἀπειθῆς τῇ οὐρανίῳ ὀπτασίᾳ, 20 ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἐν Δαμασκῷ πρῶτόν τε καὶ Ἱεροσολύμοις, πᾶσάν τε τὴν χώραν τῆς Ἰουδαίας, καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπήγγελλον μετανοεῖν καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, ἅξια τῆς μετανοίας ἔργα πράσσοντας.

Paul’s second speech as recorded by Luke in Acts is given toward the end of the book in chapter twenty-six. This is also a defense speech, but this time given before governmental authorities rather than to an angry crowd.

Setting. The larger structure of text is important to see, since our focus will center only on the conversion segment of the speech. **Narrative Introduction** to the speech: Acts 25:23-26:1.⁴⁶ From this we understand that

⁴⁶NRSV: 23 So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and Paul was brought in. 24 And Festus said, “King Agrippa and all here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish community petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 But I found that he had done nothing deserving death; and when he appealed to his Imperial Majesty, I decided to send him. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to our sovereign about him. Therefore I have brought him before



the speech was given before Agrippa II⁴⁷ with his widowed sister Bernice⁴⁸ and also the Roman governor Porcius Festus⁴⁹ was present.⁵⁰ Additionally the military staff that included the five Roman tribunes of Festus as well as prominent citizens of Caesarea (mostly if not all Gentiles) were present in the “audience hall” (τὸ ἀκροατήριον) in the city to listen to Paul defend himself. Festus is the newly installed military governor of Judea, and Agrippa and Bernice paid an official courtesy visit to the new governor in Caesarea.

Festus explains to Agrippa (25:13-22) that charges had been brought against Paul by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, but to him these charges seemed to be purely religious matters inside Judaism. When he gave

all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write— 27 for it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him.”

26 Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself:...”

⁴⁷“This is Marcus Julius Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I, who is mentioned in 12:1–11, 20–23, and of Cypros (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.9.6 §220). He was the brother of Bernice II, Mariamme, and Drusilla (who married Felix the procurator; see NOTE on 24:24). Agrippa II was born in A.D. 27, educated in Rome, and in 48 became prince of Chalcis on the death of his uncle, Herod of Chalcis (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.12.1 §223; *Ant.* 20.5.2 §104). In 52 he became ‘king’ (*basileus*) of the tetrarchy (Ituraea and Trachonitis) of Philip (Luke 3:1 [see NOTE there]), to which Nero added parts of the districts of Galilee and Perea (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.8.4 §159). He was called *basileus megas Agrippa philokaisar eusebēs kai philorōmaios*, “great king Agrippa, friend of Caesar, devout, and friend of the Romans” (OGIS §419). Agrippa II was disliked by the Jews and especially by the chief priests. He was the last of the Herodians to rule over Judea and died sometime around A.D. 92. See R. D. Sullivan, “The Dynasty of Judea in the First Century,” *ANRW* II/8 (1977): 296–354, esp. 329–45 and 344 n. 287.” [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 748-49.]

⁴⁸“At this time Bernice II, who had been married to Herod of Chalcis, was widowed and came to live at the court of her brother, Agrippa II; she was the older sister of Drusilla, wife of Felix (24:24). Josephus (*Ant.* 20.7.3 §145; *J.W.* 2.11.5 §217) tells of the gossip that circulated about a liaison with her brother. Later she was involved with the Roman Titus (see Juvenal, *Satires* 6.156–60; Suetonius, *Titi Vita* 7.1; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 65.15.4; Tacitus, *Histories* 2.2). In the year 66 Bernice pleaded with the procurator Florus to have his soldiers stop the carnage of the people of Jerusalem, and she barely escaped from them with her own life (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.15.1 §§309–14). Cf. G. H. Macurdy, “Julia Berenice,” *AJP* 56 (1935): 246–53; J. A. Crook, “Titus and Berenice,” *AJP* 72 (1951): 162–75. In most of the MSS of the Alexandrian tradition her name is spelled *Bernikē*, as it is in Josephus, *J.W.* 2.11.5 §217; but MS C reads *Berēnikē*. More correctly it should be *Berenikē*, as spelled in Josephus, *Ant.* 20.7.3 §145.” [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 749.]

⁴⁹“Porcius Festus was procurator of Judea from about AD 59 to 62, succeeding Antonius Felix. His exact time in office is not known. The earliest proposed date for the start of his term is c. A.D. 55-6, while the latest is A.D. 61.^[1] These extremes have not gained much support and most scholars opt for a date between 58 to 60. F. F. Bruce says that, ‘The date of his [Felix’s] recall and replacement by Porcius Festus is disputed, but a change in the provincial coinage of Judea attested for Nero’s fifth year points to A.D. 59’^[2] Conybeare and Howson lay out an extended argument for the replacement taking place in A.D. 60.^[3] Festus inherited all of the problems of his predecessor in regard to the Roman practice of creating civic privileges for Jews. Only one other issue bedeviled his administration, the controversy between Agrippa II and the priests in Jerusalem regarding the wall erected at the temple to break the view of the new wing of Agrippa’s palace.” [“Porcius Festus,” *Wikipedia.org*]

⁵⁰One should note the parallel here. Jesus appeared before Herod (Luke 23:6-12); Peter before Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2-4); and now Paul before Herod Agrippa II. This is a part of the Lukan strategy to parallel the ministries of Peter and Paul both with one another and then with that of Jesus. All of which is intended to demonstrate the continued blessings of God that originated in the ministry of Jesus and continued into the ministry of Peter in leading the Jewish Christian segment and finally into the ministry of Paul in his Gentile ministry thrust.

Paul the option of returning to Jerusalem to stand trial there, Paul had used his option as a Roman citizen to appeal his case directly to the emperor in Rome. Now Festus was at a loss to know what kind of legitimate Roman law based charges could be reported to the emperor that merited his attention to the matter (25:23-27). So he appeals to Agrippa to help him figure out the situation, knowing that Agrippa was more familiar with Jewish legal procedures than he was.

So on the appointed day Paul was brought into τὸ ἀκροατήριον, located in the governor's palace in Caesarea Maritima. The occasion was a combination of judicial inquiry and royal entertainment: "So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and Paul was brought in." Festus (vv. 24-27) makes his formal introduction to Agrippa explaining publicly before all the guests what he had already said to Agrippa privately earlier (vv. 13-21): "Since they were staying there several days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king." Luke's intent in relating this event seems primarily to demonstrate that this Jewish Christian from Tarsus was fully capable to addressing both an angry crowd as he had done in Jerusalem earlier (chapter 22) and also could be equally at ease in addressing powerful Roman rulers who were not Jewish (chapter 26). The speech further serves to underscore Paul's innocence before Roman authorities long before he arrived in Rome to appear before Nero to defend himself.

The Speech: Acts 26:2-24. Again the shortness of the speech underscores the summary nature of Luke's account; Paul said much more than is recorded here. But in this summation, we have the essence of Paul's defense before Agrippa along with Luke's interpretation of it. Once more the speech is by genre a Defense Speech, and exhibits the basic traits of these kinds of speeches not only in Acts but in the surrounding literature of that era.

Introduction: vv. 2-11. The beginning of the formal defense contains an appropriate complement of Agrippa (vv. 2-3) expressing Paul's pleasure to defend himself before someone who understood "all the customs and controversies of the Jews" (πάντων τῶν κατὰ Ἰουδαίους ἔθῶν τε καὶ ζητημάτων). Then Paul summarizes his youth as being focused on serving Judaism as a Pharisee (vv. 4-8). Next he describes his persecution of Christians (vv. 9-11). These last two segments overlap somewhat with Acts 9 and 22, so that we will consider them more detailedly below.

Conversion: vv. 12-18. His recounting of the Damascus road experience is the focus here of these verses. No mention of Ananias is made at all. Some of what Ananias told him as recounted in Acts 22 is included here (vv. 16-18) as words directly from the risen Christ on the road leading into the city.

Subsequent Ministry: vv. 19-23. Here the dominantly Gentile audience allows Paul to survey his activities after his conversion first in Damascus (v. 20a) and then back in Palestine and beyond. The Jewish crowd in Jerusalem cut him off before he could mention this stage of ministry (22:22).

Narrative conclusion: Acts 26:24-32.⁵¹ Paul's speech was again interrupted not by Agrippa but by Festus, who understood little about what Paul was describing (v.24). This Gentile Roman officer was not offended by the mention of a God ordained ministry to Gentiles. Instead, the assertion of the resurrection from the dead was the 'hot-button' that set off Festus. Paul's reply was to claim sanity and reasonableness and then appeal to Agrippa who had substantially greater knowledge of this Jewish perspective of resurrection (vv. 25-27). Agrippa realized that Paul was challenging him to seriously consider the claims of Christ (v.28), which Paul openly acknowledged (v. 29). Agrippa felt that he had heard enough and so ended the inquiry with the observation that Paul was not guilty of any crime (vv. 30-32), to which Festus agreed.

Analysis of the conversion aspect of the speech. We will give primary attention to the two aspects of Paul's speech that overlap the previous speech in Acts 22 and also the narrative in Acts 9. This includes the summary of Paul's youth as a Pharisee (vv. 4-11) and the encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (vv. 12-18). Missing from both this speech and the previous speech is the separate encounter with the risen Christ by Ananias described in 9:9-19. But the divine instructions given to Paul in this second speech are narrated as coming directly from Christ while Paul was outside Damascus, just as in the first speech in Acts 22. Both

⁵¹NRSV: 24 While he was making this defense, Festus exclaimed, "You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!" 25 But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. 26 Indeed the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am certain that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." 28 Agrippa said to Paul, "Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?" 29 Paul replied, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am—except for these chains." 30 Then the king got up, and with him the governor and Bernice and those who had been seated with them; 31 and as they were leaving, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." 32 Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor."

speeches stand in contrast to Acts 9 which stresses that these instructions were given first to Ananias, and then through him to Paul after Paul arrived in the city. All three accounts affirm that they came from the Lord ultimately, but Luke’s purpose in Acts 9 is to stress physical contact with the Jewish Christian community in Damascus. Paul’s two speeches concentrate on these instructions having a divine origin, which is more appropriate for both listening audiences in the speeches.⁵²

Scene:	Acts 9:	Acts 22:	Acts 26:
1. Pre-Damascus Road	vv. 1-2. <i>1 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.</i>	vv. 3-5. <i>3 I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. 4 I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.</i>	vv. 4-11. <i>4 All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. 5 They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. 6 And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, 7 a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! 8 Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? 9 Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 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. 11 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.</i>

The era of being a Pharisee is described in vv. 4-5 by Paul and stands parallel to v. 3 in the Acts 22 speech. Allusions to this are made by Luke in Acts 8:1-3 as a prelude to the narrative in chapter nine.⁵³ The time frame of this period is specified in 26:4 as Τὴν μὲν οὖν βίωσίν μου τὴν ἐκ νεότητος τὴν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς γενομένην, “my life starting from the beginning out of my youth.” This points more directly to our earlier conclusion in chapter one that Paul’s childhood was in Tarsus but his youth (νεότητος⁵⁴), especially the late teen years and twenties, was spent in Jerusalem. The emphasizing of his being in Jerusalem among the Jewish people underscores Paul’s ‘orthodox’ upbringing religiously and lays the foundation for the next claim to having been a Pharisee: κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβεστάτην αἴρεσιν τῆς ἡμετέρας θρησκείας ἐζήσα Φαρισαῖος, “according to the strictest sect of our piety I lived as a Pharisee.” This claim, Paul asserts, can easily be verified by the Jewish leaders who are opposing him and demanding that he be executed: the ‘they’ in v. 5 goes back to ‘all the Jews’ who have known Paul during his years as a Pharisee (v. 4). Even though this would go back almost three decades Paul was convinced there were those who remembered him before becoming a Christian.

The contrast in regard to the Jewish emphasis in 22:3 and 22:6-8 is that to the Jewish crowd Paul stressed his strict training and zeal for the Torah, while before the Roman authorities he stressed the core belief of the Pharisees: the resurrection of the dead as a divine promise made to Israel in the prophets of the Old Testament.⁵⁵ Agrippa would understand this, but Festus wouldn’t. This approach in the second speech helps lay

⁵²This kind of history writing is what frustrates modern critics of Luke’s style of history writing. But it was entirely appropriate within the framework of ancient methods of history writing, and forming speeches as a part of that history.

⁵³NRSV: 1 And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.

⁵⁴In Jewish tradition, ‘youth’ for a boy would designate the period from puberty to his thirtieth birthday when he became an adult. Interestingly, the terminology for being a young person only applies to males in ancient Greek. The young girl went directly from childhood to adulthood at puberty. And marriage usually followed very soon afterwards.

⁵⁵“Paul thus stresses that his dispute with the Sanhedrin is theological, not political. He invokes what he considers the traditional belief of ‘the fathers,’ i.e., the patriarchs of Israel. According to Haenchen (Acts, 683), ‘it can only concern Messianic hope—brought to

the foundation for why Paul began persecuting Christians. The teaching of the Pharisees emphasized that only by the strictest of Torah obedience could the circumcised Jew hope to gain resurrection life in eternity with God. The Christian preaching of a gospel of grace without Torah obedience represented a dangerous deviation that would seal the fate of religious Jews in eternal damnation. This emphasis on resurrection emphasized that the controversy with the Jewish authorities was based on a debated religious principle inside Judaism, not on any Roman law.

The most detailed narrative of the three about Paul's persecution of Christians comes in 26:9-11. It contains some details not given in either of the previous two accounts.

9:1. Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,

9.1 Ὁ δὲ Σαῦλος ἔτι ἐμπνέων ἀπειλῆς καὶ φόνου εἰς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου,

22:4. I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, ὅς ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν ἐδίωξα ἄχρι θανάτου, δεσμεύων καὶ παραδιδούς εἰς φυλακὰς ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας,

26:9-11a. 9 Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 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. 11 By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme;

9 Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ἔδοξα ἑμαυτῷ πρὸς τὸ ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου δεῖν πολλὰ ἐναντία πράξαι· 10 ὃ καὶ ἐποίησα ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις, καὶ πολλοὺς τε τῶν ἁγίων ἐγὼ ἐν φυλακαῖς κατέκλεισα τὴν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων ἐξουσίαν λαβών, ἀναιρουμένων τε αὐτῶν κατήνεγκα ψῆφον, 11 καὶ κατὰ πάσας τὰς συναγωγὰς πολλάκις τιμωρῶν αὐτοὺς ἠνάγκαζον βλασφημεῖν,

The core idea of persecuting Christians in Jerusalem is the same through all three accounts. But with each narrative we learn a little more about what Paul was doing. Luke carries the reader from Saul 'breathing threats' (9:1, ἔτι ἐμπνέων) to 'persecuting' (22:4, ἐδίωξα) to defining in some detail what persecuting included (26:9-11a). In 22:4 his persecution was ἄχρι θανάτου, δεσμεύων καὶ παραδιδούς εἰς φυλακὰς ἄνδρας τε καὶ γυναῖκας (unto death, binding in chains and handing over for imprisonment both men and women), to the point of death after having them imprisoned. Given the historically documented dislike of the Jews and especially their leaders in Jerusalem by Agrippa in Josephus' writings, it is not surprising that Paul would talk about persecuting Jews to him in greater detail. To be sure they were perceived as heretics, but this would not be as important to Agrippa as the fact that this Jewish Christian seemed to share some of his dislike of Jews.

Paul introduces these details as πρὸς τὸ ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου δεῖν πολλὰ ἐναντία πράξαι in v. 9. The language signals that this was a conviction that Paul believed to have come from God (δεῖν πολλὰ ἐναντία πράξαι). The targets of persecution move from being labeled as τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ κυρίου (9:1, "disciples of the Lord") to ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν (22:4, "this Way") to τὸ ὄνομα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου (26:9, "the name of Jesus of Nazareth"). The motive for this third label of Christian identification is not entirely clear. The Hebrew significance of a name is clearly behind Luke's phraseology here.⁵⁶ Beyond the clear echo of ascribing deity to Christ, it reflects the same perspective as that of the risen Christ's words to Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 9:5b): "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." The irony of the language here is that Paul thought he was being convicted by God to persecute the followers of Jesus who was actually the God he intended to serve as a Pharisee. Additionally, believers are also labeled as τῶν ἁγίων, "the saints."⁵⁷ This label for Christians is used in Acts only by Ananias (9:13), Peter fulfillment in the resurrection of Jesus—which is inseparably bound up with the hope of resurrection.' That, however, is an abuse of the word 'messianic,' which has no place here. The 'hope' of which Paul speaks is hope in the resurrection of the dead, as 24:15 and 26:8 make clear. This hope is founded on a promise made by God to Paul's ancestors, probably a reference to Dan 12:2-3. That passage in Daniel may not be a 'promise' in the strict sense, but, according to his wont, Luke makes Paul so interpret it. Earlier OT passages, such as Isa 26:19; Hos 6:2; and even Ezek 37:1-14, undoubtedly also contributed to the development of this 'hope' in late pre-Christian Judaism." [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 756-57.]

⁵⁶“The name of Jesus/Christ/the Lord' or 'his name' or simply 'the name' becomes a Lucan refrain in Acts (3:6, 16; 4:10, 17, 18, 30; 5:40; 8:12, 16; 9:14-16, 21, 27, 28; 10:48; 15:26; 16:18; 19:5, 13, 17; 21:13; 22:16; 26:9). Luke's use of it echoes the OT use of šēm, 'name,' which makes a person present to another: 'For as is his name, so is he' (1 Sam 25:25). For Luke the 'name of Jesus' connotes the real and effective representation of Jesus himself. One puts faith in it, is baptized into it; miracles are worked through it and salvation is found in it; disciples preach the name and suffer for it." [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 266.]

⁵⁷“Hagioi, the substantivized adj. 'saints,' is often used as a designation for the early Christians of Jerusalem or Judea; see 9:32, 41; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:4; Rom 15:25, 26, 31. In time it was extended to others; see Phil 1:1; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; Eph 1:1." [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Ha-

(9:31, 41), and Paul (26:10) on four occasions. A saint is someone who has been dedicated to God in the cleansing action of being made holy through conversion to Christ, and applies to all genuine Christians.

Paul then goes on to detail his persecuting actions in Jerusalem. New here is the idea stated directly that the chief priests in the temple had authorized his persecution of Christians in Jerusalem. Not only did Paul imprison many believers, he consented to the execution of others beyond just Stephen (Acts 8:1a), who evidently was but one example of the extreme lengths that Paul went to in persecution.

This included going into synagogues in the Jerusalem area to persecute Christians who were worshipping there.⁵⁸ Only one's imagination can envision what it would have been like to have been a Jewish Christian worshipping in a Friday evening Sabbath service, when in comes Paul, and openly makes charges against you for being a heretic. And if you don't renounce publicly your commitment to Christ before the synagogue group, the synagogue officials are required by the temple authorization of Paul to administer a public flogging of you before the entire congregation. And then be led out of the meeting under humiliating arrest in chains.

With this more complete picture we begin to see what lay behind earlier statements like that in 8:3, "But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison." No wonder Ananias in Damascus was very reluctant to want to go to where Paul was staying after he arrived in the city (9:13-14): "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." Luke has progressively painted the picture of Saul, the pharisaical persecutor of the church.

Scene 2 in this second speech recounts Paul's conversion encounter with Christ on the road outside Damascus.

Scene:	Acts 9:	Acts 22:	Acts 26:
2. Damascus Road	vv. 3-8. 3 <i>Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.</i> 4 <i>He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"</i> 5 <i>He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.</i> 6 <i>But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."</i> 7 <i>The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one.</i> 8 <i>Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.</i>	vv. 6-11. 6 <i>While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me.</i> 7 <i>I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"</i> 8 <i>I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" Then he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting."</i> 9 <i>Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me.</i> 10 <i>I asked, "What am I to do, Lord?" The Lord said to me, "Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do."</i> 11 <i>Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.</i>	vv. 12-18. 12 <i>With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,</i> 13 <i>when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions.</i> 14 <i>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> 15 <i>I asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The Lord answered, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.</i> 16 <i>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> 17 <i>I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you</i> 18 <i>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."</i>

Just a quick glance at the three narratives reveals a *common core structure*, and also shows up *some really distinctive elements* in the third narrative of chapter twenty-six. We will focus our attention primarily on the distinctives of the second speech in Acts 26.

First, the authorization of Paul's trip to Damascus. In 9:2, Luke depicted it as: "went to the high priest and ven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 428.]

⁵⁸“This is a new detail about Paul's persecution of Jewish Christians. The verb *timōrein*, ‘take vengeance on, punish,’ may refer to synagogal flogging, to which Paul himself attests that he was subjected (2 Cor 11:24). He would have used such means to get Christians to reject Jesus as the crucified and risen Christ. ‘Blasphe-me’ in this context would mean to speak out wrongly against, curse, or revile Jesus Christ, as Christians were often forced to do in later persecutions. See Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10.96.5 (*maledicerent Christo*); *Mart. Pol.* 9.3 (*loidorēson ton Christon*). Cf. 1 Cor 12:3; 1 Tim 1:13.” [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 758.]

asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus (ἐπιστολάς εἰς Δαμασκὸν πρὸς τὰς συναγωγάς), so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” In 22:5, it is characterized as “From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus (ἐπιστολάς δεξάμενος πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς εἰς Δαμασκὸν).” In 26:12, this authorization is described as “with the authority and commission of the chief priests” (μετ’ ἐξουσίας καὶ ἐπιτροπῆς τῆς τῶν ἀρχιερέων). The abstract aspect is emphasized in Acts 26; it was both authority (ἐξουσία⁵⁹) and a commission (ἐπιτροπῆς⁶⁰). This authority is the same as that given to Paul by the chief priests to persecute believers in Jerusalem (cf. 26:10): τὴν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχιερέων ἐξουσίαν λαβὼν, “with authority received from the chief priests.” But Paul had to secure this second authorization to go outside Jerusalem for his work. In the first narrative this is described as letters specifically addressed to the synagogues in Damascus (cf. 9:2), while in the second narrative (22:5), it is letters to the ‘brothers’ in Damascus: ἐπιστολάς...πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς εἰς Δαμασκὸν. Something of the *content of this authorization* is stressed first as “he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (9:2, δεδεμένους ἀγάγη εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ); then as “to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment” (22:5, τοὺς ἐκεῖσε ὄντας δεδεμένους εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἵνα τιμωρηθῶσιν); but nothing is specified in Acts 26. One is tempted to wonder if this young fanatical Pharisee might have stepped over the boundaries of his authorization in light of everything he describes as having done to Christians in Jerusalem (cf. 26:10-11) had he carried out his intentions in Damascus.

The *source of authorization* is first depicted in 9:2 as coming from the high priest (τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ), then in 22:5 as from “the high priest and the whole council of elders” (ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς...καὶ πᾶν τὸ πρεσβυτέριον· παρ’ ὧν καὶ...), and finally in 26:12 as from “the chief priests” (τῆς τῶν ἀρχιερέων). Although different language is employed by Luke in all three narratives, no real contradiction exists among them. The authorization request would have been processed by the Sanhedrin and the high priest would have endorsed it with his signature.

Another distinctive (26:14) in the third narrative is the mentioning that *the risen Christ spoke to Paul in Hebrew* on the Damascus road: τῇ Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ, “in the Hebrew language.” The mentioning of either Greek or Hebrew being spoken by Paul was significant the first speech: in Greek to the Roman tribune (21:37) but in Hebrew to the Jewish crowd (21:40, 22:2). But here it is Christ who speaks in Hebrew to Paul on the Damascus road. The use of “Saul, Saul” in 9:4 and 22:7 most likely implies the same thing, but it is directly stated in 26:14. Whether Luke was specifically meaning Hebrew, which was used in the temple and synagogue, or Aramaic, which was the language at home and on the streets, is not clear since the Greek word can cover both languages.⁶¹ That Paul would stress this to Agrippa with Festus present is not hard to understand.

⁵⁹**3. the right to control or command, authority, absolute power, warrant** (Sextus 36: the πιστός has ἐ. fr. God) ἐ. καὶ ἐπιτροπή (cp. Ps.-Pla., Defin. p. 415c ἐξουσία, ἐπιτροπή νόμου) *authority and commission* **Ac 26:12**. ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιεῖς; *by whose authority are you doing this?* **Mt 21:23, 24, 27; Mk 11:28, 29, 33; Lk 20:2, 8**. ἐ. διδόναι τινί *put someone in charge* (Diod S 13, 36, 2; 14, 81, 6; cp. Vi. Aesopi G 11 p. 39, 6 P.; En 9:7; TestJob 3:6; Jos., Ant. 2, 90; 20, 193) **Mk 13:34; PtK 2 p. 14, 13**. οἷς ἔδωκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τὴν ἐ. *to whom he gave rights over the Gospel* (for its proclamation) B 8:3. ὅτι τὸ ἄρχειν ἐξουσίας ἐστὶν that ruling depends on authority 6:18. Of apostolic authority **2 Cor 10:8; 13:10**; ISm 4:1. Of Jesus’ total authority **Mt 28:18** (cp. Herm. Wr. 1, 32; Da 7:14; DStanley, CBQ 29, ’67, 555–73); Hs 5, 6, 1. W. gen. of the one who has authority ἐ. τοῦ Χριστοῦ **Rv 12:10** (Just., A I, 40, 7). W. gen. of that over which the authority is exercised (Diod S 2, 27, 3; IDefixWünsch 4, 21; Ps 135:8, 9; Wsd 10:14; Sir 17:2; Jos., Vi. 190) ἐ. πνευμάτων ἀκαθάρτων *over the unclean spirits* **Mt 10:1; Mk 6:7**; cp. **J 17:2**; Hm 4, 3, 5; PtK 2 p. 14, 13; 1 Cl 61:2; ISm 4:1; τούτου τοῦ λαοῦ Hs 8, 3, 3. Also ἐπί w. acc. (cp. Sir 33:20) **Lk 9:1**; cp. **Rv 6:8; 13:7**. Likew. ἐπί w. gen. (cp. Da 3:97) **Rv 2:26; 11:6b; 14:18**. παρὰ τινος (also ἀπό τινος Orig., C. Cels. 2, 13, 56) indicates the source of the authority (s. παρὰ A3b) **Ac 9:14; 26:10**; Hs 5, 6, 4 (restored from the Lat.; ἐ. λαμβάνειν as Diod S 11, 42, 6; TestJob 8:2f; 16:4; Vi. Aesopi G 11 p. 39, 4 P.) and κατά τινος the one against whom it is directed (TestJob 16:2 κατ’ ἐμοῦ; 8:2 κατὰ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων μου ‘over my possessions’; Sb 8316, 6f κύριε Σάραπι δὸς αὐτῷ κατεξουσίαν κατὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν αὐτοῦ; Orig., C. Cels. 7, 43, 25) **J 19:11** (HvCampenhausen, TLZ 73, ’48, 387–92); B 4:13. W. pres. inf. foll. (cp. X., Mem. 2, 6, 24 and 35; Diod S 12, 75, 4; 1 Macc 10:35; 11:58; Jos., Ant. 4, 247) **Mt 9:6; Mk 2:10; Lk 5:24; J 5:27**. W. aor. inf. foll. (Jdth 8:15; 1 Esdr 8:22; 1 Macc 1:13) **19:10**. Foll. by gen. of the pres. inf. (4 Macc 5:15) Hm 12, 4, 2.—RDillon, ‘As One Having Authority’ (Mark 1:22): CBQ 57, ’95, 92–113.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 353.]

⁶⁰**ἐπιτροπή, ἡς, ἡ** (s. prec. entry; Thu. et al.; ins, pap, 2 Macc 13:14) **authorization to carry out an assignment, permission, a commission, full power** (Polyb. 3, 15, 7; Diod S 17, 47, 4; Dionys. Hal. 2, 45; POxy 743, 32 [2 B.C.] περὶ πάντων αὐτῷ τ. ἐπιτροπὴν δέδωκα; Philo, Poster. Cai. 181; Jos., Ant. 8, 162; Just., A I, 29, 2) μετ’ ἐπιτροπῆς (w. ἐξουσία) **Ac 26:12**.—M-M. Sv.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 385.]

⁶¹**Aramaic** (air-uh-may’ik), a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew. It has been spoken in the Levant from the ninth century B.C. until the present in a variety of dialects. It originated among the Arameans of northern Syria, said to be among the ancestors of Abraham (Gen. 28:2-5; Deut. 26:5). When the Assyrians conquered the Arameans, Aramean scribes within the bureaucracy of the empire made Aramaic into a universal language of the Near East, which endured from the eighth to fourth centuries B.C. Aramaic then continued in widespread use in a number of dialects through the NT period until the Arab conquest (seventh century A.D.). Several

A third distinctive in Acts 26:14 is the additional statement of Jesus to Paul: σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν, “It hurts you to kick against the goads.” The beginning question, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Σαοὺλ Σαοὺλ, τί με διώκεις;), is common to all three narratives. What was implied by the statement following Jesus’ question?⁶² With a Greek proverb, not found in ancient Jewish literature, Christ then declares that resisting the calling of God through Christ is futile. To include this in a speech before Greek speaking Romans was entirely fitting. Whether Jesus stated the idea of the futility of resisting a divine calling in the form of a Greek proverb or whether Paul and / or Luke rephrase Jesus’ words in the Greek proverb for communication to a non-Jewish audience is not clear. But the point is the same whatever the way it was communicated. And Paul had come to realize this, especially by the time of his speech to Agrippa nearly thirty years after Jesus had spoken to him.

Fourth, in the subsequent dialogue between Paul and Christ (26:15-18), Jesus’ initial answer to Paul’s question, “Who are you, sir?” (τίς εἶ, κύριε;) is the same in all three narratives: “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (ἐγὼ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ὃν σὺ διώκεις). But Acts 26:16-18 adds considerable detail to Jesus’ response. Here the three texts show individual distinctives. The Acts 9:6 instruction from the Lord, “But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do,” becomes instruction given to Ananias by the Lord (9:15-16): “for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” We are left to assume that Ananias shared with Paul these details, because the Acts 9 account does not state directly that he did. The first speech account in Acts 22:10 follows Acts 9:6 closely: “I asked, ‘What am I to do, Lord?’ The Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.’” Here Ananias shares the message from Christ with Paul (22:14-15): “Then he said, ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard.’”

But 26:16-18 contains significantly greater detail and is presented as words directly from Christ, rather than mediated through Ananias:

16 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. 17 I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles — to whom I am sending you 18 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.

In this text nothing is mentioned about Paul being baptized, as was in the first two texts. The instructions focus on Christ’s calling of Paul to ministry, rather than on salvation commitment. It is in the preaching of the Gospel by Paul that the message of salvation becomes central (v. 18). Paul is to be a faithful witness to Christ (v. 16) and Christ promises to protect Paul (v. 17).

What we are observing here is the skill of a communicator to stress what was most relevant to his audience. God’s calling was to preach the resurrection of the dead as an ancient Jewish hope that was realized in the risen Christ as the basis for believers’ hope of resurrection. To the assembled government dignitaries that day, Paul goes on to assert, “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” (vv. 19-20). These non-Jewish leaders could then

passages in the OT are written in Official Aramaic (Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Dan. 2:4-7:28; Jer. 10:10-11; Gen. 31:47). Jesus probably spoke a dialect of Western Aramaic and some words in the NT come from Aramaic, e.g., ‘Talitha Cumi,’ ‘Maranatha,’ and ‘Golgotha.’ The Dead Sea Scrolls, inscriptions, and many documents show that Aramaic was in common use during the first century A.D.” [Paul J. Achtemeier, Publishers Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 43.]

⁶²“It is hard for you to kick against the goad.” I.e., it is useless for you to try to resist this heavenly call. Though the risen Christ addresses Paul in Aramaic, he quotes a common Greek proverb, which is otherwise not found in Jewish literature. In variant forms it occurs in Euripides, *Bacchae* 794–95 (“than kick against the goads”); Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 324–25; *Agamemnon* 1624; Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 2.94–95; cf. TDNT, 3.666–67. In Greek literature the proverb expresses as idle or useless any resistance to divine influence in future conduct. So from that moment on Paul is being pressed into the service of the risen Christ. It does not express a reflection on Paul’s past life or conduct, or indicate a crisis of conscience.

“Note too Paul’s own recollections of the experience on the road to Damascus: he was “seized by Christ” (Phil 3:12); a “compulsion, necessity” (*anankē*) was laid upon him to preach the gospel (1 Cor 9:15–18).

“Cf. W. Nestle, “Anklänge an Euripides in der Apostelgeschichte,” *Philologus* 59 (1900): 46–57; R. C. Horn, “Classical Quotations and Allusions of St. Paul,” *LCQ* 11 (1938) 281–88, esp. 287–88; A. Vögeli, “Lukas und Euripides,” *TZ* 9 (1953): 415–38, esp. 416–18; J. Hackett, “Echoes of the Bacchae of Euripides in Acts of the Apostles?” *ITQ* 23 (1956): 219–27, 350–66; S. Reyero, “‘Durum est tibi contra stimulum calcitrare’: Hechos de los Apóstoles, 26, 14,” *Studium* 10 (1970): 367–78.” [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 758-59.

more easily recognize that the charges brought against Paul did indeed pertain to internal Jewish religious issues as they had suspected all along, and thus had no legitimacy in a Roman judicial setting, as they acknowledged to one another (26:31): “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” Luke then has completed building his case for the innocency of Paul from any violation of Roman law, as Agrippa tells Festus while they leave the hall, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor” (v. 32).

General observations about Paul’s conversion in the three Acts narratives.

First, only when a close examination is made of the details of each narrative does it become clear that Luke is slowly building a case for the innocency of Paul from any violation of Roman law. Corollary to this is then that the Jewish religious leaders are persecuting Paul with no legitimate basis. *Second*, only when reaching the third narrative does the reader and listener come to understand and appreciate Christ promised hardship from the outset that has been narrated through numerous examples of Paul suffering persecution in chapters twelve through twenty six. But this third speech affirms Christ’s promise to protect Paul through all of that so that the apostle could fulfill his divine commission to preach the Gospel. Tremendous spiritual insight surfaces here. God’s promise to be with us in ministry never ever exempts us from hardship and occasional extreme suffering. Rather, Paul’s experience and his words, as recorded by Luke, stress that God is working in every situation to use each experience of life for a witness to His own greatness and power.

Third, the skepticism over narrative differences in these three texts by some modern scholars miserably fails to grasp the reality that Luke worked under the guidelines of ancient history writing and not modern standards. The Bible student today cannot gain a “six o’clock evening news” accounting of how Paul came to a saving knowledge of Christ by reading these three narratives. Luke had no interest in such a presentation. Rather, he was guided by the deep conviction that the God of all creation was up to something really significant in turning around the life of this young fanatical Pharisee to make him the leader to spread Christianity into the non-Jewish world. His passion was to tell the story of Paul from this theological angle.⁶³

Fourth, the threefold conversion narrative about Paul builds to the climatic third narrative that contains the greatest amount of historical and theological detail. Next, the apostle’s travel to Rome to make his appeal to the Roman emperor (chaps. 27 & 28) will complete Luke’s literary strategy of tracing how Christianity began inside Judaism through a Jewish Savior with its initial center in Jerusalem, the Jewish religious center of the world, to the imperial capital of the world, Rome. By that point, it has become a new religious movement in its own right that includes all peoples, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

Fifth, in so shaping the narratives Luke reveals his superb skills as an ancient history writer. The narrative details in each account are presented in ways that are relevant and appropriate to the literary and historical setting of each account. The two speeches of Paul reveal a skilled Jewish speaker who could adapt his words to the individual situation and thus could comfortably address either an angry Jewish crowd almost at a mob level of functioning or a room full of non-Jewish government dignitaries with little knowledge of things Jewish. Luke’s highlighting of these aspects in the way he summarized Paul’s speeches helps the reader and listener form an image of Paul as a skilled communicator of the Gospel to whatever audience circumstance placed him in.

2.2.0 Paul’s Description

Next we turn to the writings of Paul for autobiographical insight into his conversion encounter with Christ. A thorough searching of the Pauline texts here reveals that Paul never describes his meeting Christ on the road to Damascus in historically oriented terms. He uniformly presents this experience from the religious meaning of the event. That he does assume a conversion event in his life is clear, but, in those few places where he speaks of it, the literary strategy in each instance dictates spiritual description rather than historical description as most relevant to his intentions. One would only wrongly assume from this that the historical event was unimportant to him. I suspect that he had many lengthy discussions about what happened to him that noon day on the road

⁶³“The speech that Paul delivers before King Agrippa II, Bernice, and their entourage is a finely crafted discourse, one of the finest in Acts. It is substantially a defense (*apologia*), but toward the end it becomes a missionary speech (vv 23, 28), as Paul preaches Jesus as the one promised by Moses and the prophets of old. In effect, it is a Lucan composition, a repetition of the story of Paul’s conversion (9:1–30), once again in the form of a discourse, as in 22:3–21. It is the fifth and last defense that Paul makes in Acts, and this is done before a Herodian king and a Roman procurator. Luke depicts Paul thus fulfilling the role of Christ’s ‘chosen instrument,’ who was ‘to carry my name before Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel’ (9:15). He bore that testimony before ‘Gentiles’ in Missions I, II, and III; he carried the word to ‘the children of Israel,’ often in synagogues (13:5, 14–47; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8; 23:6), and now to ‘kings’ (25:23–26:22).” [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 754–55.]

outside Damascus. But when it became relevant to mention the experience in his letters either directly or indirectly the thing most important in each instance was to provide his readers with understanding of what happened spiritually that day.⁶⁴

2.2.1 Direct References

Primary Sources:

Galatians 1:13-17

Philippians 3:4-17

The distinction between direct and indirect references here is the difference between Paul talking about his conversion (direct) and merely alluding to it (indirect). To be sure, the distinction is limited and somewhat arbitrary but it does serve to highlight the two basically different ways that mention of his own conversion surfaces inside his writings.

Two primary texts in the entire collection of Paul's writings found in the New Testament contain a recounting of his own conversion experience. And these are historically oriented only in a minor way; they both stress the religious aspect of his conversion. Galatians comes relatively early in his missionary career after the first missionary journey in the late 40s, and the Philippians comes a little over a decade later while Paul was imprisoned in Rome waiting upon his appearance before the Roman emperor Nero.⁶⁵

Galatians 1:13-17.

13 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. 14 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. 15 But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, 17 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.

13 Ἦκούσατε γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφήν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ, ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐπόρθουν αὐτήν, 14 καὶ προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου, περισσοτέρως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων. 15 ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ 16 ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι, 17 οὐδὲ ἀνήλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους, ἀλλὰ ἀπήλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν, καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.

In narrating his conversion experience with the dominate emphasis upon his calling to serve to the churches of the Roman province of Galatia, Paul adopts a pattern similar to those we found in Acts. He first talks about his life as a Pharisee leading up to conversion, then something about what happened to him in the encounter with the risen Christ, and follows that with reference subsequent activities, this third element being dominate in Galatians.

In addition to sensing the pattern of description of his spiritual experience, the role that the description plays literarily in the particular writing is critical to understanding why certain ways of describing his experience surface. In the letter body section of Galatians (1:11-6:10), the apostle begins with a defense of his claim to be an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:11-2:21) as the foundation for his defense of the Gospel message he preached (3:1-4:31). In his defense of apostleship, he makes the core claim in 1:11-12 that the gospel came directly to him from Christ in spiritual revelation rather than by being mediated to him through human sources.⁶⁶ To estab-

⁶⁴Never overlook the fundament reality that ancient letters were 'occasional' by nature. That is, they were substitute visits of Paul to where his readers lived, necessitated by circumstances that prevented him traveling there in person. In the scattered autobiographical materials in his letters, he only brings in minimal historical details where they relate to prior personal contact with his readers. Other references always take on a spiritual perspective with few if any historical details.

⁶⁵Scholarly debate over the dating of Galatians follows one of three options: 1) at the close of the first missionary journey from Antioch and prior to the Jerusalem council meeting; 2) toward the beginning of the second missionary journey after Paul had re-visited the churches established on the first missionary journey probably written from somewhere in Macedonia; 3) toward the end of the third missionary journey from Corinth about the same time as Romans was written. In previous publications over the years I have sought to make a case for option 2. In options 1 or 2, Galatians is the first letter of Paul to be written, while Philippians comes within three or four years of Paul's martyrdom. So these accounts reflect a view both toward the beginning of his ministry and near the end of it. Comparison of the two highlights any change of viewpoint about how he met Christ on the road to Damascus over the span of almost 30 years of ministry.

⁶⁶Gal. 1:11-12, NRSV: 11 For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; 12 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.

lish this point, he offers five ‘evidences’ of this that demonstrate his independence of human authorities and a dependence on them for understanding the apostolic Gospel.⁶⁷ They additionally demonstrate his determination to follow God’s leading even if this meant clashing with other Christian leaders, such as Peter, which he did at Antioch (2:11-14). This literary setting for 1:13-17 means we will find only aspects of his conversion that stress direct encounter with God and minimize the role of human agents in that experience. This will give distinctiveness to the shape of the passage.

Prior to Christ. This is described in the first of two sentences in the original Greek text in vv. 13-14. The core idea comes at the beginning of the sentence and assumes that his Galatians readers are already familiar with his life story as a Pharisee (Ἡκούσατε γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ), thus he just summarizes some essential points. These points are then presented as an elaboration (the ὅτι-clause) of τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ (“my former way of living in Judaism”), and include

1) καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐπόρθουν αὐτήν (“according to excessive zeal I was persecuting the church of God and laying it waste”)

2) καὶ προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου, περισσοτέρως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων (“and I was advancing in Judaism ahead of fellow Jews my age by being much more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors”).

In neither of these elaborations does Paul allude to specific instances of historical events that illustrate his point. Why? Clearly because his main point at the beginning of the sentence is that the Galatians were already familiar with the details. Thus he had no need to rehash them again, only to remind his readers of what they already knew. Thus Paul supplies no historical descriptions of what he did either as a Pharisee or as a persecutor of the church. And nowhere else in his writings does he do so either. How then do we as a modern reader understand what Paul references here in these two categories? Clearly our knowledge of his past history is much less than that of his initial targeted readers. The only information that is available to us comes from the more historical oriented descriptions in Acts by Luke. Thus Acts, even though a secondary source of information by definition, becomes a critical source of information about how Paul lived his life prior to becoming a Christian. To disparage Acts as a credible source of information would mean that we could know nothing about Paul’s pre-Christian life.

The tone presented by Paul here as both a persecutor and as a Pharisee is that of a young person rapidly rising up in his religion by being more religious than the average Jewish young man of his time. This is a picture very consistent with the portrait that Luke paints of Saul the Pharisee in Acts 8, 9, 22, and 26. Paul’s emphasizing of these two aspects of his early life serve to illustrate that he was subservient to no human, but instead was driven even before becoming a Christian by an extreme level of determination to follow God’s will as he understood it.

The question may arise as to why Paul linked persecution of Christians with zeal to obey the Law of Moses? The answer comes out of the background literature where one of the primary measurements of zeal for God was opposition to those considered to be heretics inside Judaism, as well as a key way to hasten the coming of the anticipated Jewish Messiah.⁶⁸ As a Pharisee, Paul viewed Christians as dangerous heretics who threatened the very institution of Judaism.

⁶⁷These proofs of the divine origin of his gospel and his calling are: 1) his conversion and calling initially, 1:13-17; 2) his limited contact with the apostles in his first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian, 1:18-20; 3) his limited interaction initially with the churches in Judea, 1:21-24; 4) the apostolic acceptance of him as an equal during the Jerusalem council visit later, 2:1-10; and 5) his calling down of Peter at Antioch for Peter’s hypocritical action of shunning non-Jewish Christians there, 2:11-14. He then effectively summarizes all this in 2:15-21.

⁶⁸“Commentators have frequently seen in Paul’s persecution of the Christian church an attempt to slay externally the dragons of doubt that he could not silence within his own heart and to repress ‘all humaner tendencies in the interests of his legal absolutism’ (C. H. Dodd, *The Mind of Paul: Change and Development*, 36; see also his *The Mind of Paul: A Psychological Approach*, esp. 12–13). But the day of the psychological interpretation of Paul’s conversion appears to be over, and deservedly so. It is probable that Paul took up his task of persecution with full knowledge of the earnestness of his opponents, the stamina of martyrs, and the agony he would necessarily cause. Fanaticism was not so foreign to Palestine as to leave him unaware of such things, and it is quite possible that he was prepared for the emotional strain involved in persecuting those he believed to be dangerous schismatics within Israel.

“More important, however, in days when the keeping of the Mosaic law was considered by Pharisaic Jews to be the vitally important prerequisite for the coming of the Messianic Age (cf. b.Sanh. 97b–98a; b. Bat. 10a; b. Yoma 86b), Paul could very well have validated his actions against Christians by reference to such godly precedents as (1) Moses’ slaying of the immoral Israelites at Baal-peor (cf. Num 25:1–5); (2) Phinehas’ slaying of the Israelite man and Midianite woman in the plains of Moab (cf. Num 25:6–15); and (3) the actions of Mattathias and the Hasidim in rooting out apostasy among the people (cf. 1 Macc 2:23–28, 42–48).” [Richard N. Longenecker, vol. 41, *Word Biblical Commentary : Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 28.]

Meeting the risen Christ. In the second sentence of this passage in vv. 15-17, his reference to his conversion is set up as a very secondary idea (v.15-16a) to the main clause expressions in vv. 16b-17: when God took action, I then did the following things. The main clause content we will explore in the next sub-point below. Again the reason for describing the situation like this is driven exclusively by Paul's purpose to demonstrate the independency of his religious experience from human authorization, as a part of the larger series of proofs he put on the table for his readers (1:13-2:21).

How does he then describe his conversion? With the dependent temporal clause, ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἀποκαλύπτει τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (“when was pleased the one having set me apart at birth and having called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me so that I might evangelize Him among the Gentiles”).

Several aspects of this merit notice. The time reference signaled by ὅτε, “when,” alludes to a definable moment of time in which the action took place. How much we understand historically about this moment depends on the nature of the verb connected to the conjunction ‘when.’ Additionally where the verb action takes place depends upon qualifying references attached to the verb action. In vv. 15-17 no specific reference to the road to Damascus is made, although his subsequent ‘return to Damascus from Arabia’ (v. 17, καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν) implies that the event was connected to the city of Damascus.

Paul uses the verb εὐδόκησεν in the Aorist tense of the Greek to signal that someone made a decision to take action, in this case it was God. This is clear even though the word ὁ θεός is not in the original text.⁶⁹ What action then did God decide to take? Paul says it was ἀποκαλύπτει τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, “to reveal His Son in me.” The verb ἀποκαλύπτω signals more than simply “God showed me,” or “God made it clear to me” which would have been expressed by δηλόω. It plays off the noun usage in vv. 11-12: δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, where Paul emphatically asserts that the Gospel that he preached come through direct revelation from Jesus Christ, in contrast to having been mediated to him through human agency. Paul’s experience was a divine revelation given directly to him from Jesus Christ. This provides us with a deeply rich verbal expression alluding to his experience with Christ on the Damascus road that Luke terms as the sudden flashing of a bright light (Acts 9:3, ἐξαίφνης τε αὐτὸν περιήστραψεν φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; cf. also 22:6, 26:13), and a heavenly vision (26:19, τῇ οὐρανίῳ ὀπτασίᾳ). The descriptive expressions of both Luke and Paul are in no way contradictory to one another, just different ways of describing the same event, consistent with the different purposes behind each account.

The content of this divine revelation is termed by Paul as τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, “His son.” Clearly Paul understood the center of the Gospel to be Jesus Christ, as he subsequently summarizes to the Galatians in 2:19-20, 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; 20 and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

His own experience of Christ affirmed what had been revealed to him by God.

The nature of this revelation that came to Paul on the Damascus road is defined by Paul as an inward experience: ἐν ἐμοί, “in me.”⁷⁰ Some have questioned whether Paul contradicts Luke here with the inward focus as opposed to the external focus of Luke in his accounts in Acts. The problem with this is underscored by two references by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:8 where he uses the verb ὁράω, ‘to see Christ’ as opposed to ἀποκαλύπτω here in Galatians, ‘to reveal Christ.’ The use of ὁράω stresses the external visionary experience, very much in line with Luke’s vantage point in Acts. But to stress external verses internal draws boundaries that neither Paul nor Luke drew.⁷¹ Again the two perspectives are best seen as complementary to one another with

⁶⁹“The manuscript support is a little stronger for the reading that includes the words ὁ θεός. But important manuscripts, followed by RSV, TOB, and Seg, lack these words, and it is possible that a copyist added them to make the subject of the verb explicit. TOB says ‘But when the One [Celui] who had set me apart ...’, but the use of capital letters does not help the person who only hears the text read. Therefore, even if translators follow the shorter text, they may wish to make the subject of the verb explicit and include ‘God’ in the translation.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 375.

⁷⁰“The expression ἐν ἐμοί, ‘in me,’ corresponds to ‘Christ lives in me’ of 2:20 and ‘God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts’ of 4:6, with all three of these passages pointing to the inward reality of Christian experience. Christ ‘in me’ is the flip side of the Christian being ‘in Christ Jesus’ (see 3:26, 28, and Comment there).” [Richard N. Longenecker, vol. 41, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 32.]

⁷¹“The term ἀποκαλύπτω (“reveal”) can mean many things.¹⁴⁵ Most commentators interpret the concept in analogy to 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8, where Paul also talks about his revelation. But in 1 Corinthians the terminology is different. In 1 Cor 9:1 (‘Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?’) and 15:8 (‘he [sc. Christ] appeared also to me’), the terms are forms of ὁρᾶν (‘see’), once active (9:1) and once passive (15:8). Both suggest external visions rather than internal experiences.¹⁴⁶ This raises the other question of how to interpret ‘in me’ (ἐν ἐμοί). Does

Paul's emphasis in Galatians seeking to stress that the impact of the encounter with Christ in conversion is a 'coming of Christ into the life of a person' and not just an outward meeting with Jesus.

The purpose of God's revelation of Christ to Paul is stated as ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, "so that I might *evangelize* Him among the Gentiles." I intentionally used the awkward word 'evangelize' to stress that Paul here claims God's mission for him was to 'gospelize' the Gentiles. No modern language translation can do full justice to Paul's word here with translations like "proclaim him," "yo le anunciara," "je l'annonçasse," or "ihn durchs Evangelium verkündigen." These expressions capture the basic idea but not the richer meaning of the Greek word εὐαγγελίζωμαι that implies more than just speaking a message. Unquestionably Paul's emphasis on the assigned mission that came from God in his conversion is consistent with Luke's even stronger emphasis.

In qualifying when God decided to take action to reveal Christ to Paul, a couple of participles are attached to the verb εὐδόκησεν as a twin participle subject of the verb. Literally Paul asserts that it was the One who first set him apart at birth (ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου) and then called him by grace (καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ) who decided to take action. Both of these prior actions by God led up to the decision to reveal Christ to Paul. What Paul came to understand was that God had marked out him for this revelation and mission assignment from the very moment of his physical birth years before. The revelation of Christ then came out of a divine call to accept Christ based on God's grace and not on anything Paul had achieved as a Pharisee. The profound insight here is that God's coming to us in salvation is not for our benefit, even though we do benefit. Salvation is a calling to follow Christ into service to others, consistent with Jesus' call to "Follow me" in the gospels.

After coming to Christ. Paul's primary emphasis in 1:15-17 is to stress what he didn't and did do subsequent to his encounter with Christ. These are stated in a series of main clauses: a) εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι, "immediately I did not consult with flesh and blood," b) οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱερουσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους, "neither did I go up the Jerusalem to the apostles before me," c) ἀλλὰ ἀπήλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν, "instead I went away (from Damascus) into Arabia," and d) καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν, "and subsequently I returned to Damascus." Although this list of activities goes beyond our focus on Paul's conversion, it should be noted that the depiction here contains details not mentioned by Luke in any of the three accounts. His narratives (Acts 9:19b-25; 26:19-20) leaves the general impression that after conversion and baptism Paul spent time in Damascus where he began preaching Christ in the synagogues. In Galatians Paul inserts a trip into Arabia between a two phased time in Damascus, before traveling back to Jerusalem.⁷²

What can we glean from this recounting of Paul's conversion? *First*, no essential tension between Paul's brief mentioning of it and Luke's longer narration of it exists. When properly understood in the context of the distinctive purposes for recounting this moment in Paul's life, the four accounts complement one another wonderfully well. *Second*, Paul's experiencing of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus was a life changing event in his life, and all four texts make this point abundantly clear. *Third*, Paul's account in Galatians highlights even more than Luke's that a conversion encounter with the risen Christ is the basis of a mission assignment to serve Christ through serving others. We are called by God to serve, not sit on a pew! The distancing of conversion from calling to ministry in modern theology is unbiblical and utterly contradictory to Paul's experience as narrated by the apostle himself and also by Luke. Ministry assignment comes as a part of conversion.

Philippians 3:3-17.

3 For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no

this refer to a 'mystical' experience¹⁴⁷ or is the reference simply equal to a dative (= 'to me')?¹⁴⁸ The 'mystical' interpretation once had many supporters, but has nowadays fallen into disrepute. Also, the interpretation as a dative makes it easier to reconcile Gal 1:16 with 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8 and the accounts in Acts (9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:9-18).¹⁴⁹ But we must avoid deciding the matter by way of outside influences or apologetic interests. We should not suppose that Paul feels he contradicts himself in Gal 1:16 and 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8. Apparently for him the two forms of visions (external and internal) are not as distinct as they may be for some commentators. Paul can use a variety of concepts and languages when he describes his vocation, which in any case he does only rarely. There are indications, however, that we should take his words seriously. The 'in me' corresponds to Gal 2:20 ('Christ ... lives in me')¹⁵⁰ and 4:6 ('God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts').¹⁵¹ Paul does not explain how the three passages are related to each other, but we may assume that they complement each other. This would mean that Paul's experience was ecstatic in nature, and that in the course of this ecstasy he had a vision (whether external or internal or both—I do not know, God knows' [cf. 2 Cor 12:2, 3]). This interpretation is supported by the debate about Paul's vision in the ps.-Clem. Hom. 17. 13-19.¹⁵² [Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia—a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 71.]

⁷²Scholars are divided over where to place the Arabian visit: a) immediately after his baptism, or b) later after spending some time in Damascus. Put another way, does the Arabian visit go after Acts 9:20 or before 9:23? The text doesn't answer this question.

confidence in the flesh — 4 even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. 16 Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.

3 ἡμεῖς γάρ ἐσμεν ἡ περιτομή, οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες, 4 καίπερ ἐγὼ ἔχων πεποιθήσιν καὶ ἐν σαρκί. Εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἄλλος πεποιθέναι ἐν σαρκί, ἐγὼ μᾶλλον· 5 περιτομῆ ὀκταήμερος, ἐκ γένους Ἰσραὴλ, φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος, 6 κατὰ ζήλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος.

7 Ἀλλὰ ἅτινα ἦν μοι κέρδη, ταῦτα ἤγημαι διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν ζημίαν. 8 ἀλλὰ μενούγγε καὶ ἠγοῦμαι πάντα ζημίαν εἶναι διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου δι' ὃν τὰ πάντα ἐζημιώθην, καὶ ἠγοῦμαι σκύβαλα ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω 9 καὶ εὐρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει, 10 τοῦ γνῶναι αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ καὶ κοινωνίαν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ, 11 εἴ πως κατανήσω εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν.

12 Οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, διώκω δὲ εἰ καὶ καταλάβω, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ κατελήμφθην ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ. 13 ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ ἑμαυτὸν οὐ λογίζομαι κατεληφέναι· ἐν δὲ, τὰ μὲν ὀπίσω ἐπιλανθανόμενος τοῖς δὲ ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος, 14 κατὰ σκοπὸν διώκω εἰς τὸ βραβεῖον τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. 15 ὅσοι οὖν τέλειοι, τοῦτο φρονῶμεν· καὶ εἴ τι ἑτέρως φρονεῖτε, καὶ τοῦτο ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἀποκαλύψει· 16 πλὴν εἰς ὃ ἐφθάσαμεν, τῷ αὐτῷ στοιχεῖν.

17 Συμμιμηταὶ μου γίνεσθε, ἀδελφοί, καὶ σκοπεῖτε τοὺς οὕτω περιπατοῦντας καθὼς ἔχετε τύπον ἡμῶν·

The second lengthy recounting of conversion by Paul in his letters comes toward the end of his earthly life in his letter to the Philippians from Rome in the early 60s. The literary setting of vv. 3-17 is established by vv. 1-2, “1 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard. 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!” With Τὸ λοιπόν, “finally,” in verse one Paul signals a shift to the last major section of the letter body. Then verse two cautions against being vulnerable to false teachers who were advocating the necessity of Jewish circumcision as a Christian salvation requirement.⁷³ This warning extends down to 3:21. Verses 3-16 come as the first of two bases for the warning, the second one being vv. 17-21. Thus our text is an autobiographical account contrasting the legitimate experience of Paul to the phoney experience of the heretics in verse two. The second reason for being on guard against these people in vv. 17-21 is an appeal to the Philippians to follow Paul’s example in Christian commitment in rejection of the heretics’ example. We must expect that what Paul shares about his life in vv. 4-16 will be focused on drawing the sharpest possible contrast between himself and his opponents.

The header for the passage is verse three: ἡμεῖς γάρ ἐσμεν ἡ περιτομή, οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες (for we are the circumcision, who serve by God’s Spirit, and take our pride in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh). Here Paul identifies himself with his readers as the true circumcision in contrast to the others in verse two. This is evidenced by three indications: he and his readers are **a)** οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες (“those rendering religious service by God’s Spirit”); **b)** καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, (“those finding their joyful satisfaction in Christ Jesus”); and **c)** καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες (“and those not having confidence in fleshly accomplishments”). Each of these three points contains the implicit corollary that his opponents are actually doing the exact opposite of these. The καίπερ, “even though,” introduces Paul’s suggestion that his life exemplifies one who could legitimately put confidence in fleshly accomplishments. The

⁷³The intensity of the highly emotional expression is reflected in the loaded labels Paul slaps on his opponents and the threefold repetition of the warning: Βλέπετε τοὺς κύναις, βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν. (“Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!”)

reader will want to remember the contrastive statement here because it anticipates Ἀλλὰ ἅτινα ἦν μοι κέρδη, “but those things that were gain to me,” in verse seven where he emphatically denies any spiritual value for any of these fleshly accomplishments listed in verses 5-6.

The pre-Christian era in his life is summarized in vv. 4-6. Then vv. 7-11 allude to the difference that Christ has made in his life. This is then followed by vv. 12-16 that affirms Paul’s continuing passion to follow the religious course of knowing Christ that his conversion brought. Finally, vv. 17-21 appeal to his Philippian readers to adopt his stance rather than that of the heretics. With the limited objective we have attention will be focused on the first two sub-units of material.

Verses 4-6 describe Paul’s pre-Christian background more as a pedigree of being an orthodox Jew than as a narration of the details of his life. Verse 4b sets up the contrast of Paul’s claims to the claims of his opponents: Εἴ τις δοκεῖ⁷⁴ ἄλλος πεποιθῆναι ἐν σαρκί, ἐγὼ μᾶλλον, “if anyone else considers himself to have a basis for confidence in fleshly accomplishments, I more.” Then Paul lists a series of Jewish pedigree qualifications for fleshly accomplishments:

1) περιτομῆ ὀκταήμερος, “circumcised on the eight day.” The phrase affirms strict orthodox circumcision as a Jewish baby by his parents.⁷⁵

2) ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ, “(born) out of the nation of Israel.” Next Paul descended from the nation of Israel as the covenant people of God.⁷⁶

3) φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, “(born) of the tribe of Benjamin.” Not only was he an Israelite but he belonged to one of the two tribes of the southern kingdom that didn’t break off from the nation after Solomon’s death and was one of the most respected tribal groups among the Jews.⁷⁷

4) Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων, “a Hebrew of the Hebrews.” The exact meaning of this phrase is not clear, but

⁷⁴The Greek verb δοκεῖ encompasses two perspectives in the same expression: a) ‘if anyone else seems to have...’ and b) ‘if anyone considers himself to have...’ Modern western languages force the Bible translator to go one or the other direction in translating this verb, but the verb itself includes both perspectives at the same time.

⁷⁵“Paul now begins to list his advantages, the first of which is contained in a terse verbless expression, lit. ‘with respect to circumcision an eighth-day-er.’ περιτομῆ, ‘circumcision,’ a noun with passive force in the dative case (here a dative of reference: ‘with respect to’; BDF §197), is coupled with ὀκταήμερος, an adjective not found elsewhere in the NT but used substantivally here to mean ‘an eighth-day person’ (cf. John 11:39). Together the words describe one who was circumcised on the eighth day of his life. With only two words, then, the apostle has made for himself the proudest claim any Jew could make, namely, that in strict conformity with the law he was circumcised on precisely the right day (Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3; cf. Luke 1:59; 2:21). Unlike Ishmael, who was circumcised when he was thirteen years old (Gen 17:25; contrast Gen 21:4), as were his descendants (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.12.2 §§213–14), and unlike heathen proselytes to Judaism who were circumcised as adults, Paul was circumcised on the eighth day by parents who were meticulous in fulfilling the prescriptions of the law. He was a true Jew, a Jew by birth. He was no proselyte converted to Judaism in later life, no ‘Johnny-come-lately,’ we may say.” [Gerald F. Hawthorne, vol. 43, *Word Biblical Commentary : Philipians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 184.]

⁷⁶“Next, Paul proudly affirms that he descended from the nation of Israel. He means by this that he possessed all the rights and privileges of God’s chosen people because he belonged to them by birth, not by conversion. Ἰσραήλ, “of Israel,” a genitive of apposition, refers here to the race (γένος) and not to the patriarch. It was the sacred name for the Jews as the nation of the theocracy, the people in covenant relationship with God (J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, 7th ed. [London: Macmillan, 1881] 224; Rom 9:4; 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22). The name Israel calls to mind the glorious history of an illustrious nation (see G. von Rad, K. G. Kuhn, and W. Gutbrod, TDNT 3:356–91) and was of such continuing significance that apparently Hellenistic Jews, or more likely Jewish Christians as in 2 Cor 11:22, used it prominently in their propaganda efforts (Georgi, *Opponents*, 46–49; Collange; Martin [1976]; Bruce; O’Brien).” [Gerald F. Hawthorne, vol. 43, *Word Biblical Commentary : Philipians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 184.]

⁷⁷“Again there is a note of pride expressed as the apostle writes these words; for the tribe of Benjamin, though small (Ps 68:27), was nevertheless highly esteemed: (1) Its progenitor was the younger of the two sons born to Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife (Gen 30:23, 24; 35:16–18). (2) Of all the sons of Jacob, only Benjamin was born in the Promised Land (Gen 35:9–19; see Str-B 3:622) and singled out as a tribe specially “loved by Yahweh” (Deut 33:12; Fee [1995], 307). (3) From this tribe came Israel’s first anointed king (whose name the apostle carried; Beare, Moule; cf. 1 Sam 9:1–2). (4) The holy city of Jerusalem and the temple were within the borders of the territory assigned to Benjamin (Judg 1:21). (5) The tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to the house of David at the time of the break-up of the monarchy (1 Kgs 12:21). (6) After the exile, Benjamin and Judah formed the core of the new colony in Palestine (Vincent; cf. Ezra 4:1). (7) The tribe of Benjamin always held the post of honor in the army, a fact that gave rise to the battle cry ‘Behind you, O Benjamin!’ (Judg 5:14; Hos 5:8). (8) The famous Mordecai, responsible for the great national deliverance commemorated in the feast of Purim, was a Benjamite (Esth 2:5). (9) Benjamin resisted the inroads that pagan culture made among the other tribes and remained ‘pure’ (Gnilka). (10) It is possible that respect for Benjamin can be traced further back to an even earlier period than that indicated in the references cited above (see Parrot, Abraham, 42–51; Collange). Paul, then, seems to revel in the fact that he is a Benjamite (as in Rom 10:1; 11:1). He seems also to have inherited the good qualities of strength, courage, purity, and loyalty that characterized his tribe.” [Gerald F. Hawthorne, vol. 43, *Word Biblical Commentary : Philipians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 184–85.]

seems to contrast Paul's very orthodox Jewish upbringing in contrast to that of many Hellenistic Jews, of which he was a part.⁷⁸

5) κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος, “regarding the Law a Pharisee.” The Pharisees were generally considered to be the most religiously devout group inside Judaism.⁷⁹

6) κατὰ ζήλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, “regarding zeal, persecuting the church.” One of the most significant marks of piety for a Pharisee was opposing all groups of Jews who posed a threat to the promotion of Torah obedience. Paul saw Christians in that category and so went after them viciously.⁸⁰

7) κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος, “regarding righteousness gained by the Law, blameless.” His faithfulness in obeying the Torah gave him the sense that little or any of it had been missed or overlooked.⁸¹

⁷⁸“He may have meant by this that he was a ‘Hebrew born of Hebrew parents’ (JB; note the force of the preposition ἐκ, ‘from,’ ‘out of’), i.e., that there was no non-Jewish blood in his veins. Or he may have meant that, like his parents and grandparents before him, he was brought up to speak the Hebrew language (Moule, ExpTim 70 [1958–59] 100–102; Str-B 3:622; but see also W. Gutbrod, TDNT 3:389–90) and carefully to observe the Jewish national way of life. He may, then, in effect be contrasting himself with the Hellenists, who were Jews who usually spoke Greek and who allowed their style of life to be affected by Gentile customs and culture (Acts 6:1; 22:2; cf. 2 Cor 11:22; the identity of ‘Hellenists’ in early Christianity continues to be debated; see Hengel, ‘Between Jesus and Paul’; C. C. Hill, DLNT, 462–69). Although Paul himself was born outside of Palestine (in Tarsus) and therefore could rightly be labeled a Hellenist, he in essence rejects this label, because not only was he the son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6), who saw to it that he was educated precisely in the ways of the Jewish law in Jerusalem under a Hebrew teacher (Acts 22:3), but he himself gladly adopted the Hebrew language as his own language (Acts 21:40; 22:2) and accepted the customs and manner of life of his forefathers (Acts 26:4–5). Paul claims, therefore, to be a Hebrew of Hebrews, one belonging to the elite of his race, tracing his ancestry beyond Tarsus to Palestine (see van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem?* 46–47). While this may be taken to have provided a safeguard against the influences of hellenization by the protective walls of Jewish tradition (Dibelius), this alleged ‘protection’ of Second Temple Judaism in a cocoon of isolation may be less than once thought, as the walls of cultural and linguistic separation have now been shown to be porous (I. H. Marshall, NTS 19 [1972–73] 271–87; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*). Paul may have been a ‘true Jew,’ yet at the same time he was open to Greek influences emanating from the Diaspora.” [Gerald F. Hawthorne, vol. 43, *Word Biblical Commentary : Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 185.]

⁷⁹“Paul turns now from the things that he enjoyed as a result of his birth and upbringing to describe those advantages he possessed by virtue of his own choice and diligence. He does this with a series of three terse phrases, none of which has a verb and each of which begins with the preposition κατὰ, ‘according to,’ ‘in relation to,’ ‘concerning,’ ‘as far as it concerns,’ ‘in respect to,’ and so on. The first of these, lit. ‘according to law, a Pharisee,’ means ‘with regard to the Jewish law I was [and am] a Pharisee.’ Although the word Φαρισαῖος, ‘Pharisee,’ is used ninety-nine times in the NT, this is its only occurrence outside the Gospels and Acts. The Pharisees were a ‘small’ religious party in Paul’s day (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.2.4 §§32–45; 18.1.3 §§12–15; J. W. 2.8.14 §§162–63), but they were the strictest of the Jewish groups (Acts 26:5) as far as adherence to the law was concerned. Not content merely to obey the law of Moses, the Pharisees bound themselves also to observe every one of the myriad of commandments contained in the oral law, the interpretive traditions of the scribes (see O’Brien, 375–76). The most ardent of the Pharisees scrupulously avoided even accidental violations of the law and did more than they were commanded to do (Caird; Moore, *Judaism*, 1:66; Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, 246–67). Paul, a son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6) and a disciple of the great Pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3), chose to be a Pharisee himself and set himself to be the most earnest of the earnest observers of the Jewish law (Gal 1:14). Pharisee for Paul was not a term of reproach but a title of honor, a claim to ‘the highest degree of faithfulness and sincerity in the fulfillment of duty to God as prescribed by the divine Torah’ (Beare). On Paul’s revised attitude to Torah religion see 2 Cor 3:1–18, yet Acts portrays him as still continuing to claim Pharisee status, ‘I am a Pharisee’ (23:6); Paul would have added: not a converted Pharisee, but a completed one.” [Gerald F. Hawthorne, vol. 43, *Word Biblical Commentary : Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 185–86.]

⁸⁰“But Paul was not satisfied with merely keeping the law. His zeal as a Pharisee drove him to persecute the church (lit. ‘according to zeal, a persecutor of the church’). ζήλος, ‘zeal,’ for God, for the purity of his covenant community, for his law, marked the true servant of God (cf. Num 25:1–18; Ps 106:30, 31; Sir 45:23; 4 Macc 18:12; cf. also 1 Kgs 19:10, 14; Ps 69:9; especially Phinehas in the verses mentioned [Bockmuehl, 199–200]), and it was a ‘well-known characteristic of the Pharisees, who in part traced their line to the Maccabees’ (Martin [1976], 128; cf. 1 Macc 2:24–29; T. Asher 4:5; 1QH XIV, 14) or maybe back to the Essenes (see Martin, *New Testament Foundations*, 1:84–89, to be updated by Saldarini, ABD 5:289–303). Hence, not because Paul was evil, but precisely because he was ‘good,’ an ardent Pharisee, zealous for God, inflamed with zeal for the law and committed to keeping the community of God pure, he did what he later came to lament, namely, persecute the church (1 Cor 15:9; cf. Acts 22:2, 5; 26:9–11; cf. 1 Tim 1:13).” [Gerald F. Hawthorne, vol. 43, *Word Biblical Commentary : Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 186.]

⁸¹“This is the third achievement Paul could point to with pride as a result of his diligence. Like the rich young ruler in the gospel story (Luke 18:21), Paul had kept all the commandments from his youth up. He had met the standards necessary for achieving a righteousness that was rooted in the law. Here Paul is using δικαιοσύνη, ‘righteousness,’ in the sense of conformity to external rules that are considered to be the requirements of God (on the meaning of this difficult word in Paul see D. Hill, *Greek Words*, 139–62; and for a treatment of the word in Phil 3:7–11 see Koperski, *Knowledge*, chap. 4). Since he had worked to achieve complete conformity to these rules, leaving nothing undone, no outsider could blame him, nor did he blame himself (γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος, ‘having been blameless’; ἄμεμπτος, ‘blameless,’ is related to the verb μέμψεσθαι, ‘to blame someone,’ for sins of omission [Lightfoot]). In this sense of omitting nothing that was required of him, Paul, then, could claim without presumption that he had become faultless (cf. W. Grundmann, TDNT

Such a listing of religious accomplishments is impressive indeed from a purely human standpoint. Paul put these on the table for the Philippians to consider, evidently because his opponents were claiming valid credentials as Jews in order to justify their opposing version of the Gospel.

In comparison to the portrait of Paul here to the three Acts narratives, only some of these correspond directly to Acts. Paul excelled in Torah obedience (#7): // Acts 22:3, 26:5 // Gal. 1:14. Paul was persecuting the church (#6): // Acts 9:1, 22:4-6, 26:9-11 // Gal. 1:13. Paul was a Pharisee (#5): Acts 22:3, 26:5-8. Paul was born a Jew (#2): // Acts 22:3. Those traits mentioned here but not in Acts are a) being circumcised on the eighth day and b) being from the tribe of Benjamin. But such data would not have been particularly relevant to any of the three Acts narratives, and the first four of these traits relate to Paul's Jewish ancestry which is unquestionably affirmed in other ways in the Acts narratives. Again, the Bible interpreter must allow for different purposes behind all five of these narratives in Acts and in Paul's writings to govern how to frame appropriately the portrait of his pre-Christian life.

Verses 7-11 describe *the impact of Christ's coming into Paul's life*. In this depiction, Paul does not actually describe his conversion encounter with Christ on the Damascus road. Instead, he emphasizes the impact of that encounter on his life from conversion onward. He begins (v. 7) by asserting that this impressive list of accomplishments as a Pharisee has been turned from the positive to the negative: Ἀλλὰ ἅτινα ἦν μοι κέρδη, ταῦτα ἤγημαι διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν ζημίαν, “*but those things that were gain to me, these I count as loss for the sake of Christ.*” In commercial language, κέρδη (+) and ζημίαν (-) were reversed with the coming of Christ into his life.

He repeats this for emphasis in v. 8: ἀλλὰ μενοῦνγε καὶ ἠγοῦμαι πάντα ζημίαν εἶναι διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου “*more than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*” With even blunter force he stresses this point a third time: δι’ ὃν τὰ πάντα ἐζημιώθην, καὶ ἠγοῦμαι σκύβαλα ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, “*for his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.*” He turned loose of everything in his past and in his religious heritage in order to come to Christ.

Note also the progression in what was gained in conversion. The διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν (“*because of Christ*”) becomes διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου (“*because of the surpassing greatness of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*”) and then turns into the eschatological quest: ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ (“*so that I might gain Christ and be found in Him*”). This eschatological hope is then defined as: μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει (“*not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith*”). Unquestionably the coming of Christ into Paul's life completely restructured it so that his entire existence centered around deepening this spiritual union with the risen Christ. This meant the complete re-ordering of how he lived: τοῦ γινῶναι αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ καὶ κοινωνίαν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμαι ὡς αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν (“*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead*”).

Although described in different ways by Luke in Acts, the changed life of Paul the Pharisee to Paul the Christian is a major theme of Luke in recounting Paul's conversion with the coming of Christ into his life as the decisive turning point. Thus the two sets of accounts must be seen as complementary to one another.

In vv. 12-16, Paul summarizes a life of Christian service in terms of knowing Christ in a way that experiences Christ's resurrection power and participation in Christ's sufferings. Here almost at the end of his earthly life the apostle emphatically asserts that he still has a long way to go in realizing this goal of knowing Christ. He has suffered horrific persecution over these years (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-28⁸²), yet he feels he needs to learn more. He developed a profound spiritual relationship with Jesus over these decades of service, but he doesn't yet know enough about Jesus. Thus his focus is on διώκω, “*I press on,*” the key verb of this passage. Just as previously he was persecuting the church (also διώκω in 3:8), just as passionately he presses on (διώκω in 3:12, 14) to gain

4:573; Goguel, JBL 53 [1934] 257-67). This statement by Paul leaves no place for the view—once popular, now universally rejected—deduced from Rom 7 ‘that before his conversion Paul was a Jew who had an uneasy conscience over the stoning of Stephen and a growing dissatisfaction with his own religion’ (Keck, 853; see also Mitton, ExpTim 65 [1953-54] 78-81, 99-103, 132-35; Stauffer, New Testament Theology, 93; Ridderbos, Paul, 129 n. 3; against Deissmann, Paul, 93-95). In every way he considered himself to be a model Jew, quite satisfied with himself until he met the living Christ.” [Gerald F. Hawthorne, vol. 43, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2004), 187.]

⁸²For a helpful online background discussion of persecution, see W. Harold Mare, “Persecution,” *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

increasing knowledge of Christ. In vv. 17-21, he admonishes the Philippians to follow his example here, rather than the disastrous example of his opponents.

2.2.2 Indirect References

The following references in Paul's writings are grouped as indirect references simply because they only contain a passing mention of his conversion experience, unlike the two passages above which go into greater detail. They are primary sources because they come out of Paul's writings.

Primary Sources:

- 1 Corinthians 9:1
- 1 Corinthians 15:8-10
- 1 Timothy 1:12-17

The two brief references to conversion in **First Corinthians** are found in 9:1 and 15:8-10. In **9:1**, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions: Οὐκ εἰμι ἐλεύθερος; οὐκ εἰμι ἀπόστολος; **οὐχὶ Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἑώρακα**; οὐ τὸ ἔργον μου ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἐν κυρίῳ; (“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? **Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?**”). As a part of his defending his claim to apostleship, he alludes to his Damascus road encounter with Christ by the question οὐχὶ Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν ἑώρακα; This was Paul's validating credential for apostleship in regard to the criteria set forth by Luke in Acts 1:21-22, “21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—**one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection** (μάρτυρα τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ σὺν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι ἓνα τούτων).” Here the encounter is described in terms of a vision in having seen Christ in resurrected form: ἑώρακα, which is very much in line with Luke's depiction in Acts; note especially the use of τῆ οὐρανίῳ ὄπτασίᾳ (“**to the heavenly vision**”) in 26:19 to describe this experience.

In 1 Corinthians **15:8-10**, Paul refers to the Damascus road experience as a resurrection appearance of Jesus to him, that was in line with the other appearances to all the apostles (15:7), James (15:7, ὥφθη), the 500 followers (15:6, ὥφθη), to the twelve (15:5, ὥφθη), and to Peter (15:4, ὥφθη). This is a part of the validation of the Gospel message that centered on preaching a resurrected Christ (15:1-10) contending that Jesus established his resurrection through appearances to various gatherings of believers prior to His ascension into Heaven. The language describing the Damascus road encounter is ὥφθη κάμοί (“**he was seen also by me**”). By the repetitive use of the verb ὀράω uniformly through these six references, Paul's encounter with Christ near Damascus stands on an equal plane with the appearances to the other leaders. The unique aspect for him, however, was that this appearance was linked to a conversion / call to ministry experience, unlike for the others who were already followers of Christ.

In **First Timothy 1:12-17**, Paul presents an autobiographical summation of his ministry to the young preacher Timothy who was seeking to help the Christian community at Ephesus solve many of its problems.

12 I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because **he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, 13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.** 15 The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the foremost. 16 But for that very reason **I received mercy**, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

12 Χάριν ἔχω τῷ ἐνδυναμώσαντί με Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, ὅτι **πιστόν με ἠγγήσατο θέμενος εἰς διακονίαν, 13 τὸ πρότερον ὄντα βλάσφημον καὶ διώκτην καὶ ὑβριστήν· ἀλλὰ ἠλεήθην, ὅτι ἀγνοῶν ἐποίησα ἐν ἀπιστίᾳ, 14 ὑπερεπλέονασεν δὲ ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν μετὰ πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.** 15 πιστὸς ὁ λόγος καὶ πάσης ἀποδοχῆς ἄξιος, ὅτι Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς ἦλθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἀμαρτωλοὺς σῶσαι· ὧν πρῶτός εἰμι ἐγώ, 16 ἀλλὰ διὰ τοῦτο **ἠλεήθην**, ἵνα ἐν ἐμοὶ πρῶτω ἐνδείξηται Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς τὴν ἅπασαν μακροθυμίαν, πρὸς ὑποτύπωσιν τῶν μελλόντων πιστεῦειν ἐπ' αὐτῷ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον. 17 τῷ δὲ βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων, ἀφθάρτῳ, ἀοράτῳ, μόνῳ θεῷ, τιμὴ καὶ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων· ἀμήν.

Here the issues of authorship of the letter are substantial and have generated considerable debate over the past two centuries.⁸³ My assumption is that the letter did come from Paul and was sent to Timothy shortly

⁸³For a somewhat detailed discussion of this debate, see “First Epistle to Timothy,” Wikipedia.org. The unnamed writer of this article takes a rather balanced stance and presents both sides of the debate reasonably well, letting the readers of the article draw their own conclusions.

after Paul was released from Roman imprisonment in the early 60s when he then resumed a limited ministry in the north central Mediterranean region. This text of 1:12-17 functions as the letter Proem and thus it takes on the tone of thanksgiving to God for divine blessings, typical of this section in Paul's letters.

In the midst of personal expression of gratitude to God, Paul alludes to his conversion experience (i.e., ***the bold - italic red print*** above) with emphasis on divine mercy being shown to him. Verses 12-14 are made up of a single sentence in the Greek text with the beginning expression of thankfulness as the core expression. The ὅτι - clause beginning in the middle of verse 12 introduces a lengthy expression of Paul's reason for being thankful. Typical to both the other Pauline passages and to the Acts' perspective, conversion and calling to ministry are linked together tightly here. Conversion is described first as a divine strengthening of Paul: τῷ ἐνδυναμώσαντί με Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν with the Aorist participle. This came about when God determined Paul could be made fit for ministry (πιστόν με ἡγήσατο θέμενος εἰς διακονίαν) in spite of his sinful persecution of believers (τὸ πρότερον ὄντα βλάσφημον καὶ διώκτην καὶ ὑβριστήν). Once divinely judged to have potential for ministry Paul became the object of God's mercy: ἤλεήθην. Why? At least in part, because he acted ignorantly in disbelief (ὅτι ἀγνοῶν ἐποίησα ἐν ἀπιστίᾳ). The receiving of divine mercy now is described (v. 14) as the abundant flowing of God's grace into Paul bringing with it faith and love through spiritual union with Christ: ὑπερεπλεόνασεν δὲ ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν μετὰ πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. The repeated use of Aorist tense verbs here points to his conversion experience. Again Paul's sense of unworthiness as a sinner surfaces (v. 15): πιστὸς ὁ λόγος καὶ πάσης ἀποδοχῆς ἄξιος, ὅτι Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς ἤλθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἁμαρτωλοὺς σῶσαι· ὧν πρῶτός εἰμι ἐγώ. The receiving of divine mercy (ἤλεήθην) is repeated again but this time to emphasize divine calling: ἵνα ἐν ἐμοὶ πρῶτῳ ἐνδείξηται Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς τὴν ἄπασαν μακροθυμίαν, πρὸς ὑποτύπωσιν τῶν μελλόντων πιστεύειν ἐπ' αὐτῷ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον. Paul sensed that God desired to use his conversion and service as an inspirational example to encourage others to come to Christ and to help them understand what happens in conversion. The section closes with a doxology of praise to this God who so greatly blessed the apostle (v. 17).

Again we see the common pattern of the pre-Christian life being contrasted with the divine action of salvation. This we have uniformly seen through both Acts and Paul's writing. The language and descriptive approach differs in each passage because of the different purposes behind the writing of each text. But the essential ideas are common and thus complementary to one another. The Proem nature of this depiction in First Timothy shapes the expression as profound thanksgiving to God. Here is an important lesson for us today.

2.2.3 Comparability of Paul's and Luke's Accounts

Hopefully from this rather detailed analysis of accounts of Paul's conversion by both Paul in his writings and by Luke in Acts, you have come to recognize a common pattern. Two aspects merit re-emphasis. **First**, the pre-Christian life is contrasted with the significance of Christ's coming into Paul's life. This serves to heighten the understood impact of Christian conversion on Paul. Consistent to Luke's narratives is a depiction of the pre-Christian era as centered on devotion to Torah obedience that led to persecuting Christians. Specific aspects of this are spelled out by Luke in Acts. Paul's letters make the same emphasis about his pre-Christian life, but more in terms of descriptive characterization as a persecutor rather than recounting specific actions of persecution. His passionate commitment to obey the Torah is likewise stressed in Paul's accounts.

The coming of Christ into Paul's life is described in several ways among the various accounts in Paul's writings and in Acts. But uniformly they all stress a life-transforming encounter with the risen Christ that turned his life around completely.

Second, uniformly through all the passages is the close linking of conversion and calling to ministry. Paul sensed from the very beginning that God was favoring him not primarily for his benefit. Rather, God had something far more profound in mind: Paul was to proclaim this life-changing Jesus to the Jewish and non-Jewish world of his day. Christian salvation is not 'getting one's soul saved'! Such promotes an egocentric religion very contrary to what Paul experienced. Rather Christ comes into our lives so that we can become an instrument of witness for Him to change the lives of other people as He has ours. Thus for Paul the entire Christian experience pivoted solely around nourishing one's relationship with Christ.

2.3.0 Paul's Theology of Conversion

One can -- and should -- ask how Paul's conversion experience translated itself into his teaching and

preaching about Christian salvation.⁸⁴ Space doesn't permit an in-depth analysis here, but hopefully enough detail will be placed on the table to provide a basis understanding. Here we give summary attention to Paul's teaching about how to become a Christian, drawing primarily from his letters.

2.3.1 The Vocabulary of Conversion

When trying to understand how Paul presented the idea of coming to Christ in his preaching and teaching, one critically important starting point is to become more familiar with his 'vocabulary' of conversion. A wide diversity of terms will be found both in Paul's writings, as well as in the rest of the New Testament, related to an individual coming to God in the experience of conversion. Some of the terms look at the same experience of conversion but from different perspectives, e.g., repentance, saved, redeemed; other terms will encompass a broader scope that includes conversion as one part at the beginning of a life-long process, e.g., salvation, Kingdom of God, Lordship of Christ. The dilemma of the modern scholar is finding a descriptive label, or simple depiction, sufficiently broad to encompass all of the biblical perspectives.

The English word "conversion" is frequently used in today's religious world to describe an individual becoming a Christian, but the equivalent word in the Greek New Testament, ἐπιστροφή, is not commonly used.⁸⁵

⁸⁴An important methodology note here. The contemporary biblical theology movement tends to split over the most appropriate methodology for analyzing the biblical materials. The article "Biblical theology," *Wikipedia.org* provides a basic summary of several issues within the discipline. Should the approach be to trace the historical development of the story of God's redemption from the beginning in the Old Testament to the climax in Revelation of the New Testament? Some say yes, but many argue that the better approach is to trace the distinctive themes and motifs of each document. A mosaic picture of theology emerges, rather than a simplistic picture.

Inside the biblical theology discipline are numerous sub-disciplines. I will only address the New Testament side of it since that's where our attention is focused here. There's the theology of the gospels (or, of Jesus), the theology of Paul, the theology of John, and the theology of Peter. Inside each of these categories one will find further sub-divisions like the theology of Matthew, the theology of Mark etc. Methodologically the older approach was to take the traditional categories of systematic theology (= dogma, dogmatics), such as the doctrine of God, of the person and work of Christ, of the Holy Spirit etc., and then trace their appearance in each of the writings connected to Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John. The more dominant newer approach is to assess the distinctive themes that are prominent in each document by a given leader such as Paul.

Then next question is how to present the wholistic views of Jesus, Paul, Peter, and John? Should they be presented in a one dimensional pattern along the lines of systematic theology with relevant doctrinal categories as the organizing structure? Or, -- as most attempt to do -- should the existing themes in Paul's writings be presented from a salvation history perspective that assumes growth and development of understanding in religious belief? This approach is enormously more complex, in part because a chronological time line for the life of the person and of his writings is foundational to the method.

Implicit in this last approach especially is the tendency to try to find a central "key" to "unlock" the mind of Paul. With deep roots in Martin Luther and those Reformers who followed afterward was the conviction that this key was "justification by faith, apart from works of law" as found prominently in Romans and Galatians. This reflects the enormous influence that Luther had on Protestant Christianity for several centuries. At the beginning of the twentieth century the German theologian, Albert Schweitzer (1875-1952), turned the biblical studies world on its head with his massive volumes on the theology of Jesus and of Paul by contending that eschatology is the key to both Jesus and Paul. Not until toward the end of the twentieth century have Pauline theology studies begun to move away from some version of Schweitzer's contention. The field is very diversified today, but the motif of being "in Christ" tends to be more dominant than most other alternatives.

The problem with much of the biblical theology movement has been its struggle to impose western style post-Enlightenment rational thinking back on to Paul. Obviously Paul didn't think this way, since he lived and died over 1500 years before the Enlightenment and the emergence of western rationalism. Many scholars have recognized this, but have argued that since modern man does think this way the ideas of Paul must be filtered through such a screen before they can be understood clearly in modern society. Others have rejected this with the contention that the theology of Paul can only be accurately presented as a collection of random topics and motifs without any centrally unifying theme. This approach dominates Pauline studies in the larger scholarly world today, and consequently the field of biblical theology has seen diminished importance in biblical studies generally.

Evangelical scholars tend to work in biblical theology more prevalently today than any other segment of biblical scholarship. Some hang on to the straight jacket of German rationalism from three centuries ago so that Pauline theology is largely Dogmatic Theology just from the writings of Paul. Others are more sensitive to the 'then' and 'now dilemma of biblical theology, and try to find creative ways of working around the questionable assumptions of a one dimensional approach.

If you are a real 'eager beaver' on this topic, you might explore the course room for Religion 314, *New Testament Theology*, that I taught at Gardner-Webb University. In the "Topics" page are hyper links to lectures I gave as well as paper presentations from students taking the class.

⁸⁵"Although the term 'conversion' is common in theological and religious discussion today, it was a relatively rare term in the Bible. In its current popular usage it refers to someone who has come to Christ or become a Christian. The biblical roots of the concept involve the use of two terms that mean 'to turn' (Heb. *sub*; Gk. *epistrepho* [ἐπιστρέφω]). However, the New Testament usage is more like the common theological meaning. Examples of conversion, outside the New Testament, emerge when one looks at the term "proselyte," the convert from a Gentile way of life to Judaism. Such an example pictures in everyday Greek terminology what a convert looked like."

The noun ἐπιστροφή, “conversion,” is used one time in the entire New Testament.⁸⁶ Although the verb ἐπιστρέφω is used some 35 times, it is seldom translated by the English word “convert.”⁸⁷ The core idea is that of “turning” and can be applied to a physical action, a mental action, or a religious action.⁸⁸ The nature of the turning action is determined by either what is turned from (ἐκ τινος), or, what is turned to (ἐπί / πρὸς τι), or a combination of both.

With the religious thrust one finds the following: turn to the Lord (ἐπί τὸν κύριον), Acts 9:35, (πρὸς τὸν κύριον (2 Cor. 3:16); to God (ἐπί τὸν θεόν), Acts 26:20, (πρὸς τὸν θεόν), 1 Thess. 1:9. Also, turn from sin (ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν), Acts 14:15, 15:19^(?); turn from darkness into light (ἐ. ἀπὸ σκοτῶν εἰς φῶς καὶ τῆς ἐξουσίας τ. σατανᾶ ἐπί τ. θεόν), Acts 26:18. It is used by itself with this religious meaning four times, with three instances (Matt. 15:13; Mk. 4:12; Acts 28:27) taken from Isaiah 6:10 and also in Luke 22:32. Its use with μετανοεῖν in Acts 3:19 (cf. also 26:18-20) is instructive: “Repent therefore, and **turn to God** so that your sins may be wiped out,…” (μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ **ἐπιστρέψατε** πρὸς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας). Since both verbs contain the core idea of turning, the double emphasis is on turning one’s life to God both inside (mentally) and out (behavior).

Thus if one only looked at the ἐπιστροφή / ἐπιστρέφω group of words, he would be hard pressed to conclude anything except that the apostle never talked much about turning from a life without God to one with God, even though this was central to his experience. Luke, on the other hand, does make use of these terms with the idea of religious conversion - as the above listing illustrates.⁸⁹

But our study has clearly demonstrated that a turning of one’s life to God through Christ is central to Paul’s Christian experience. Thus, a more encompassing definition of conversion needs to be considered.⁹⁰ What Paul experienced on the way to Damascus and then what he talks about in his preaching and teaching doesn’t make

[Darrell L. Bock, “Convert, Conversion,” *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Bible Theology*]

⁸⁶Acts 15:3, **So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers.** (οἱ μὲν οὖν προπεμφθέντες ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας διήρχοντο τὴν τε Φοινίκην καὶ Σαμάρειαν ἐκδηγοῦμενοι **τὴν ἐπιστροφήν τῶν ἐθνῶν**, καὶ ἐποίουν χαρὰν μεγάλην πᾶσι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς.)

⁸⁷For example, the English word “convert” shows up only five times in the NRSV translation of the New Testament.

⁸⁸William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 382.

⁸⁹Interestingly only very limited use of this pair of Greek words shows up in the early church fathers in the second and third centuries, suggesting that ‘conversion’ language did not become the dominant way of referring to coming to God through Christ. It was used on occasion, but not often:

In early Christianity as in the NT there is no hard and fast use of the verb. Thus in Barn., 4, 8 and Herm. s., 8, 7, 5 it denotes “falling away” into idolatry as in the OT → 724, 19 ff. On the other hand apostasy and error are the occasion of repeated admonitions to the community to “turn” again to the Lord, to the right way, Pol., 7, 2; 1 Cl., 18, 13, cf. ψ 50:15.35 God Himself is besought in prayer to “bring back” those who go astray, 1 Cl., 59, 4; for always He has given an opportunity of repentance to those who “turn to” Him, 1 Cl., 7, 5. In this sense 1 Cl. 8, 3 looks like a Chr. paraphrase of Is. 1:18; it is not taken from an apocryphon like other OT verses.³⁶ Herm. v., 1, 3, 1 and s., 9, 26, 2 speak of sinners in the house of the Lord and the congregation which the prophet is to “convert” and which have the chance of conversion acc. to the revelation given to the prophet. Acc. to Herm. m., 6, 1, 5 conversion leads to the right way which is also the easy one.³⁷ There is also an admonition to conversion in m., 9, 2; 12, 4, 6; 6, 2. “The Lord is near to those who convert,” we read in v., 2, 3, 4 (quoting an apocr. apc).³⁸ The words of faith and love spoken by the community have the power of “conversion” and hope (εἰς ἐπιστροφήν καὶ ἐλπίδα), Barn., 11, 8. Conversion and hope go together like repentance and faith. Conversion and repentance are not a once-for-all event; they control the Christian life, cf. 2 Cl., 15, 1 (ἀποστρέψαι); 16, 1; 17, 2; 19, 2.

The compound is not very common in the Apologists. The use has no new features as compared with that of the Bible.

[*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 7:728-29.

⁹⁰“However, understandings of what conversion involves and what it means are conveyed in diverse ways and cannot be confined to the study of particular terms. To explore the biblical understandings of conversion involves not only a study of particular words but an examination of the varying imagery for conversion.

“The unclarity that surrounds the English word ‘conversion’ complicates any discussion of conversion in the Bible. In his classic study of conversion in early Christianity, Arthur Darby Nock defined conversion as ‘the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right’ (Nock 1933: 7). While this definition adequately describes certain uses of the term, it also implicitly eliminates some changes that are customarily described as conversions (e.g., Ruth, whose conversion appears to be a matter of an allegiance to Naomi and her customs; the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius, neither of whom appears to undergo a radical change of consciousness). If the term ‘conversion’ is applied more widely than Nock’s definition would allow, then there are numerous biblical texts that warrant consideration as examples of conversion.” [David Noel Freedman, vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 1131-32.]

much use of the ἐπιστροφή / ἐπιστρέφω terminology, but he does describe this life transformation.⁹¹

2.3.2 The Concept of Conversion (in Paul's writings)

In Paul's writings we discover that what often is labeled "conversion" is instead described as "how *you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,*" (1 Thess. 1:9, πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων δουλεῦν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ). Also "indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when *one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed*" (2 Cor. 3:15-16, ἀλλ' ἕως σήμερον ἡνίκα ἂν ἀναγινώσκηται Μωϋσῆς κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τὴν καρδίαν αὐτῶν κείται· ἡνίκα δὲ ἐὰν ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς κύριον, περιαιρείται τὸ κάλυμμα.)

This turning moment for the apostle is bound up in a faith commitment to Christ, which is the more prevalent way Paul alludes to this turning moment.⁹² Rom. 13:11 is instructive and representative of his writings:

⁹¹"Despite both the vivid accounts in Acts and its well-established place in Christian imagination, Paul's conversion occupies only a fragment of his letters. Indeed, because Paul says so little about this topic, and because he does not speak of changing religions, many students of his letters insist that it is inappropriate to speak of Paul as having experienced a 'conversion,' and prefer the term 'call' in order to capture the motif of the prophetic call that appears in Gal 1:15-16. It has also been suggested that the term 'transformation' be used for Paul's particular conversion, since it is not a change of religions but a radical reinterpretation of his understanding of God's actions in and will for the world. This debate itself reflects the previously noted confusion about the English word 'conversion.'

"Whatever term is applied to the change Paul experienced, the evidence about it in his letters is slender. He indicates that he was a faithful Jew whose zeal surpassed that of his peers (Phil 3:5-6; Gal 1:14). Nevertheless, his experience of the risen Jesus (1 Cor 9:1-2; 15:8-10) inaugurated a radical transformation (Phil 3:7); contained within that transformation was Paul's call as apostle to the gentiles (Gal 1:15-16; 1 Cor 9:1-2; 15:8-10). While some interpreters still see in Romans 7 an indication that Paul was driven to his change by guilt over his inability to keep the law, the predominant view is that Romans 7 reflects on some aspect of the human situation and is not an autobiographical reflection. Of the dramatic details included in Acts 9, 22, and 26, Paul says nothing, not even that he was traveling to Damascus (see, however, Gal 1:17).

"When referring to the conversions of others, Paul often speaks of God as calling (1 Cor 1:2), purchasing (1 Cor 6:20), liberating (Rom 6:17-18), or giving grace (Rom 3:21-26) to human beings. This is consistent with his conviction that it is God who takes the initiative with the world in a new way in the gospel rather than human beings who act to placate or please God. When he does use the language of converting or turning to God, it is in very traditional contexts that refer to gentiles taking up the worship of the true God, such as in 1 Thess 1:9 (cf. Gal 4:9). More often, he refers to the point at which persons acknowledge God's action in Jesus Christ as "faith" or "belief" (Rom 13:11), which results in radical transformation, a transformation that is still God's gift (Rom 12:1-2)." [David Noel Freedman, vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 1132.]

⁹²"31.85 πιστεύω^b; πίστις^b, εὼς f: to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance—'to believe in, to have confidence in, to have faith in, to trust, faith, trust.'

"πιστεύω^b: ὃς δ' ἂν σκανδαλίση ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων τῶν πιστευόντων εἰς ἐμέ 'if anyone should cause one of these little ones to turn away from his faith in me' Mt 18:6; ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραάμ τῷ θεῷ 'Abraham trusted in God' Ro 4:3; ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ κατασχυνοῖ 'whoever believes in him will not be disappointed' 1 Pe 2:6.

"πίστις^b: ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ 'you have faith in God' Mk 11:22; ἤκουσεν αὐτοῦ περὶ τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν πίστεως 'he listened to him (as he talked) about faith in Christ Jesus' Ac 24:24; ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται 'he who is righteous because of his faith shall live' Ro 1:17; ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ 'we heard about your faith in Christ Jesus' Col 1:4.

"In rendering πιστεύω^b and πίστις^b it would be wrong to select a term which would mean merely 'reliance' or 'dependency' or even 'confidence,' for there should also be a significant measure of 'belief,' since real trust, confidence, and reliance can only be placed in someone who is believed to have the qualities attributed to such a person.

"31.86 πιστός^a, ἡ, ὄν: (derivative of πιστεύω^b 'to trust,' 31.85) pertaining to trusting—'one who trusts in, trusting,' ὥστε οἱ ἐκ πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ 'so those who believe are blessed with Abraham, the one who trusted' or 'Abraham trusted (in God) and was blessed; so all who believe are blessed as he was' Ga 3:9.

"31.87 πιστός^b, ἡ, ὄν: (derivative of πιστεύω^b 'to trust,' 31.85) pertaining to being trusted—'faithful, trustworthy, dependable, reliable.' δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ καὶ πιστῷ 'good and faithful servant' Mt 25:21; ταῦτα παράθου πιστοῖς ἀνθρώποις 'pass these on to reliable men' 2 Tm 2:2; πιστὸς ὁ λόγος 'this word can be trusted' 2 Tm 2:11. Since πιστός^b is a type of passive derivative of πιστεύω^b, it may be necessary in a number of languages to render this passive relationship in an active form. For example, the phrase δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ καὶ πιστῷ in Mt 25:21 may be rendered as 'good servant and one whom I can trust.' In 2 Tm 2:11 the phrase πιστὸς ὁ λόγος may be rendered as 'this is a saying we can have confidence in' or '... that we can trust.'

"31.88 πίστις^c, εὼς f: the state of being someone in whom complete confidence can be placed—'trustworthiness, dependability, faithfulness.' μὴ ἡ ἀπιστία αὐτῶν τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ καταργήσει 'that doesn't mean that their lack of faithfulness annuls the faithfulness of God' Ro 3:3.

"31.89 ἀπιστία, ας f: the state of being someone in whom confidence cannot be placed—'lacking in trustworthiness, unfaithfulness.' μὴ ἡ ἀπιστία αὐτῶν τὴν πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ καταργήσει 'that doesn't mean that their lack of faithfulness annuls the faithfulness of God' Ro 3:3. The occurrence of both ἀπιστία and πίστις (31.88) in this expression in Ro 3:3 may cause certain difficulties in appropriately rendering the meaning in other languages. It may therefore be necessary to spell out in some detail the fuller implications of ἀπιστία and πίστις. Moreover, the question implies a negative response, but the question (since it is rhetorical) can easily be rendered as a strong negative statement, for example, 'the fact that they were persons who could not be trusted does not mean that God cannot be trusted.'

“Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than **when we became believers**” (Καὶ τοῦτο εἰδότες τὸν καιρὸν, ὅτι ὥρα ἦδη ὑμᾶς ἐξ ὕπνου ἐγερθῆναι, νῦν γὰρ ἐγγύτερον ἡμῶν ἢ σωτηρία ἢ **ὅτε ἐπίστεύσαμεν**). Salvation as an initial action of God is a part of Paul’s vocabulary.⁹³ Thus the σώζω / σωτηρία word group is important terminology in Paul’s vocabulary.⁹⁴ Here deliverance from the danger of sin and its eternal consequences are central.

The further one probes into Paul’s writings the more it becomes clear that this life changing experience that he had shaped deeply his understanding about authentic religious experience. The reality of coming to God through faith commitment to God’s Son became central to his understanding of the Gospel, as a couple of places where he sums up his message illustrate:

Rom. 1:1b-6, NRSV: set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, 3 the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh 4 and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, 5 through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, 6 including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ 2 ὃ προεπηγγείλατο διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφαῖς ἀγίαις 3 περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, τοῦ γενομένου ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, 4 τοῦ ὀρισθέντος υἱοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν, 5 δι’ οὗ ἐλάβομεν χάριν καὶ ἀποστολὴν εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ, 6 ἐν οἷς ἐστε καὶ ὑμεῖς κλητοὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

1 Timothy 2:3-7, NRSV: 3 This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, 6 who gave himself a ransom for all —this was attested at the right time. 7 For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

3 τοῦτο καλὸν καὶ ἀπόδεκτον ἐνώπιον τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ, 4 ὃς πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν. 5 εἷς γὰρ θεός, εἷς καὶ μεσίτης θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων ἄνθρωπος Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς, 6 ὁ δοὺς ἑαυτὸν ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων, τὸ μαρτύριον καιροῖς ἰδίους· 7 εἷς ὁ ἐτέθη ἐγὼ κῆρυξ καὶ ἀπόστολος— ἀληθειαν λέγω, οὐ ψεύδομαι— διδάσκαλος ἔθνῶν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀληθείᾳ.

All the days of his Christian pilgrimage he sought to probe ever more deeply the meaning of such encounter and then to share it with others.

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 375-76.]

⁹³“Salvation means death to and freedom from sin (Rom 6), a new perspective that transcends the human point of view and participation in a new creation (Rom 5:16-17), peace with God (Rom 5:1), life as adopted children of God’s (Gal 4:4), baptism into Christ’s death (Rom 6:4), and the reception of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5, 8).” [William T. Arnold, “Salvation,” *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*]

⁹⁴“21.25 σωτηρία^a, ας f: a state of having been saved—‘salvation.’ ἡ γὰρ κατὰ θεὸν λύπη μετάνοιαν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἀμεταμέλητον ἐργάζεται ‘for the sadness that is used by God brings repentance that leads to salvation, in which there is no regret’ 2 Cor 7:10; κομιζόμενοι τὸ τέλος τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν σωτηρίαν ψυχῶν ‘receiving the purpose of your faith, that is, the salvation of your souls’ 1 Pe 1:9.

“21.26 σωτηρία^a, ας f: the process of being saved—‘salvation.’ ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος τῆς σωτηρίας ταύτης ἐξαπεστάλη ‘the message about this salvation has been sent to us’ Ac 13:26. Although it is difficult and sometimes impossible to determine whether σωτηρία refers to the state of being saved (21.25) or the process of being saved, in some languages it is obligatory to choose one or the other meaning.

“21.27 σώζω^b: to cause someone to experience divine salvation—‘to save.’ εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεός ... σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας ‘God decided ... to save those who believe’ 1 Cor 1:21; τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω ‘so I became all things to all people that I might save at least some’ 1 Cor 9:22; χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι ‘you have been saved by grace’ Eph 2:5.

“21.28 σωτήριος, ον: pertaining to divine salvation—‘saving, bringing salvation.’ ἐπεφάνη γὰρ ἡ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ σωτήριος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ‘the saving grace of God has appeared to all people’ or ‘the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all people’ Tt 2:11.

“21.29 σωτήριον^a, ον n: the means by which people experience divine salvation—‘salvation, the way of saving, the manner of saving.’ ὄψεται πᾶσα σὰρξ τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ‘all will see the way God saves’ Lk 3:6.

“21.30 σωτήριον^b, ον n: the message about God saving people—‘the message of salvation, the message about being saved.’ ὅτι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπεστάλη τοῦτο τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτοὶ καὶ ἀκούσονται ‘that this message about God saving people has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen’ Ac 28:28.

“21.31 σωτήρ^b, ἦρος m: (derivative of σώζω^b ‘to save,’ 21.27) one who saves—‘Savior.’ τοῦ σωτήρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ ‘God our Savior’ 1 Tm 2:3; ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτήρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν ‘from where we wait for (our) Savior the Lord Jesus Christ’ Php 3:20.”

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 240-41.]

2.3.3 Paul's Ideas in Comparison to Others

How does Paul's understanding of conversion compare to other leaders in the New Testament? When the four gospels are examined for Jesus' understanding of an encounter with God the central role of the Kingdom of God becomes clear, especially in the first three gospels.⁹⁵ For Christ, the transformation of sinful humanity hinged upon God coming into a person's life and taking control of it. Only then could there be the necessary cleaning up of a polluted life that would provide a place of dwelling for a righteous God. In Pauline thought, the lordship of Christ⁹⁶ compares to Jesus' emphasis on the Kingdom. For Jesus' teachings, the so-called "entrance sayings" are important because they speak of requirements for entering the Kingdom (cf. Matthew 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23–24; 23:13).⁹⁷ Although some have found tension between Jesus and Paul at the very point of the life changing encounter with God, no real tension exists here. Both had a profound grasp that when a sinful person comes into the presence of a holy God, a deep transformation of that person must happen for a relationship between the individual and God to emerge. God must take control; the person must surrender his will to that divine control. Then cleansing and fellowship can emerge. For Paul, the grace and love of God for the sinner stood as the foundation of this transformation. And such life changing encounter could only happen because of what Christ had accomplished on the cross (Rom. 3:20-26):

20 For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. 21 But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; 26 it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

Conclusion

What can we say? Both Luke and Paul provide us clear insight into what happened to Saul of Tarsus that noon day outside the city of Damascus. He met Christ face to face in a life changing manner. It reversed the course of his existence and opened the door for three plus decades of faithful ministry proclaiming the difference that Christ can make in the life of every person willing to surrender control to the Son of God. Throughout that thirty plus year ministry the apostle spent much time reflecting and seeking deeper insights into the deep mystery of coming to God through Christ. He preached that insight to Jews and Gentiles all over the eastern Mediterranean Sea region. He taught that insight in the profoundly rich letters that we have in our New Testament. He had a clear sense of being in spiritual union with Christ. And passionately desired the entire world to share that relationship to Christ.

⁹⁵"The heart of Jesus' teachings centers around the theme of the kingdom of God. This expression is found in sixty-one separate sayings in the Synoptic Gospels. Counting parallels to these passages, the expression occurs over eighty-five times. It also occurs twice in John (3:3, 5). It is found in such key places as the preaching of John the Baptist, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt 3:2); Jesus' earliest announcement, "The time has come... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15; cf. Matt 4:17; Luke 4:42-43); the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, "your kingdom come" (Matt 6:10); in the Beatitudes, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3 Matthew 5:10); at the Last Supper, "I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25); and in many of Jesus' parables (Matthew 13:24; Matthew 13:44; Matthew 13:45; Matthew 13:47; Mark 4:26; Mark 4:30; Luke 19:11)." [Robert H. Stein, "The Kingdom of God," Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology]

⁹⁶"The epistles of the apostle Paul abound with references to Jesus as Lord. Each reference has profound theological implications for the person and work of Christ. For example, Paul declared that the lordship of Christ was revealed through his preexistence and his participation in the creation of the world (1 Cor. 8:6). The genuineness of regeneration and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is revealed through the confession that 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor. 12:3). The expression 'Our Lord, come!' (1 Cor. 16:22) may be a reference to the second coming of Christ, a reference to his presence in the worship of the congregation, or both.

"As Lord, Jesus is designated as 'the powerful Son of God by the resurrection from the dead according to the Spirit of holiness' (Rom. 1:4). The earliest confession of redeemed believers was 'Jesus is Lord,' which accompanied the inner conviction that God raised Christ from the dead (Rom. 10:9). The universal confession of all creation at the Last Judgment and in the final state will also be 'Jesus Christ is Lord' (Phil. 2:11)." [R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 36.]

⁹⁷To be sure, the moment of entry can be understood either as conversion or as in eschatological judgment. For the present reign of God in this world, the entry corresponds to conversion; but eschatological entry corresponds to the consummation of salvation in Paul.



For Reflection and Further Study⁹⁸

1. Compare and contrast the accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts 9:1-16a, 22:4-8, and 26:9-18.
2. Summarize what Paul described about his own conversion in Galatians 1:13-17 and Philippians 3:4-17.
3. How did Paul subsequently teach the idea of conversion to others in his writings?
4. Describe your own conversion experience to Christ.

⁹⁸A section in each chapter will offer opportunities to apply some of the concepts treated in the discussion. Of course, these are optional learning activities. But I do want to challenge you the reader to begin applying appropriate skills in furthering their understanding of Paul.