

Paul's conversion



**ASSIGN
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Provide an overview of Paul's story of his conversion as found in Acts 9: 1-19, 22: 3-16, and 26: 8-9. Saul of Tarsus was a zealous leader in the opposition of Christianity. He viewed Jesus as a blasphemer and heretic whose followers were just as guilty. Saul felt that by arresting and persecuting them “ he was doing a service acceptable to God”. He requested letters from the church leaders in Jerusalem to “ authorize his persecution of the Christians” in Damascus. On his way, Saul was stopped and blinded by a bright light and loud voice.

Those traveling with him did not understand what Saul was experiencing. Confused, Saul asked who was speaking to him. After learning that it was the Lord, Saul obeyed what he heard. His companions led him into Damascus. A devout Christian named Ananias came to visit Saul, after being prompted by God, and healed his blindness by placing his hands on Saul's eyes. Saul remained in Damascus for three days, learning and teaching then left to share the gospel of Jesus. Are the differences in these accounts normal variations found when someone retells an important event, or are they clear indicators of a fabrication?

Give evidence for your view. The biggest difference found is in the reactions of Saul's companions. They either “ heard the sound but did not see anyone” or “ saw the light, but they did not understand the voice”. According to Hedrick, both of these phrases in the Greek can mean that they did not have an intellectual understanding of what they saw and heard. When Luke told Saul's conversion story these three times in the book of Acts, each telling was for a different purpose.

The Acts 9 version is considered the traditional miracle story. While the Acts 22 version tells of Paul's commissioning. The version in Acts 26 was abbreviated as part of the greater story of that chapter. These narratives are meant to supplement and complement, not contradict each other. " In fact, the complete story of Paul's conversion, as Luke understood it, can only be determined by bringing together features from all three narratives. The entire story is not completely narrated in any one of the three accounts. "

How can Paul's story of his conversion be used as a model for Christians today? As Paul shares his conversion story with King Agrippa in Acts 22, he tells it in a clear and simple way. He shares briefly about his life before meeting Jesus, focuses on his conversion to Christ and then tells how, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he has lived a changed life since that time. " The more clearly the true caliber of Saul is perceived, the more evident does it become that any change in his attitude toward Jesus and His disciples is hardly to be expected.

Yet he was gloriously transformed, and the fact, thrilling in itself, is so tremendous in its outreach that the divine character of Christianity can safely be made to rest on that fact alone, so impossible is it of any naturalistic explanation. " (Harrison, 188.) Much like Luke's purpose for the book of Acts, " the confirmation of the Gospel," (Carson & Moo, 305.) a Christian's purpose for sharing his or her conversion story should be to point people to the life changing work of Jesus.