

Having been seized by the Jews and then arrested by the Romans (vv26-36), vv37-40 describe Paul's desire to address the Jews. From vv37-38 it appears the Roman commander confused Paul for the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness" (v38). To which Paul responded, v39—"I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people." And thus, v40 describes Paul standing on the stairs in order to address the angry crowd of Jews. V40b—"And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying."

I. His Past (vv1-5)

II. His Conversion (vv6-16)

III. His Calling (vv17-21)

I. His Past (vv1-5)

1. V1—"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now. And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent."
2. Since Paul was a Roman citizen and a native Hebrew, he evidently spoke Greek and Hebrew fluently.
3. He basically says two things about his past: his birth and upbringing (v3), and his persecution of Christians (vv4-5).
4. (1) His birth and upbringing, v3—"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today."
5. Paul was a "Hebrew of Hebrews"—which means both his father and mother were Hebrews (or Jews).
6. While he was born in Tarsus he was brought up or raised in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel (a well-respected Hebrew scholar).
7. He was "taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law" which refers to Pharisaic glosses and traditions.
8. If you remember, there was God's law (Moses and the customs) and then there was the additions of the Pharisees.
9. To be a good Pharisee you not only needed to obey all of the OT laws, but also the traditions of the fathers.
10. This he did while being "zealous toward God"—that is, he generally believed he was pleasing to God.
11. (2) His persecution of Christians (vv4-5)—"I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women."
12. Not only was he diligent in keeping the law of God and traditions of men, but he persecuted Christians.
13. Paul was responsible for gathering Christians into prison so that they could be whipped and put to death.
14. Thus, while Paul may not have personally killed Christians, he indirectly had their blood on his hands.
15. Acts 26:10-11—"This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against

them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities."

II. His Conversion (vv6-16)

1. We can summarize Paul's conversion with three words—a revelation (vv6-10), an interpretation (vv11-15), and a profession (v16).
2. (1) A revelation (vv6-10), vv6-7—"Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me."
3. That this great light was an actual physical light is evident in that those with Paul also saw it (v9)—though only Paul was blinded by it.
4. And so, having blinded Paul by the light, our Savior speaks to him in a way only Paul could hear (v9).
5. V7—"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"—that is, why are you persecuting My people who are united to Me.
6. V8—"So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'"
7. Our Savior here reveals Himself to Paul as Jesus of Nazareth—that is, as the resurrected and glorified Christ.
8. This revelation immediately changed Paul's mind, as he responded in total submission to His Lordship.
9. Now we have to keep in mind that Paul previously believed Jesus of Nazareth was a dangerous fraud.
10. He believed He was a liar and deceiver, and so it was for this reason he sought to arrest His followers.
11. But now, Christ had revealed Himself to him, which meant, He was alive and thus who He claimed to be.
12. V10—"So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.'"
13. Go to Damascus, because there I will give your further directions through a means I will reveal to you.
14. (2) An interpretation—having sent the blinded Paul to Damascus, he encounters a man by the name of Ananias who sheds further light on the situation.
15. V12—"Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there."
16. It's through Ananias that Paul receives his sight (v13) and then further understanding about what occurred.
17. Verses 14-15—"Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.'"
18. Here Ananias further instructs Paul on what's taken place—he was chosen by God to see the resurrected Christ.
19. That is, Paul had been chosen to be the final and/or last apostle (who were eye-witnesses of His resurrection).

20. In using the phrase "the God of our fathers" Ananias was underscoring the relation of the Old and New Testaments.
21. The very same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had chosen Paul that he should know His will, see the Just One, and hear His voice.
22. The phrase "the Just One" is a Messianic title and describes Him as the Righteous and Holy Messiah.
23. Thus, it was the choice of the Father that Paul would know His will, see the Messiah, and hear His voice.
24. V15—"For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard"—that is, the resurrected and glorified Messiah.
25. (3) A profession, v16—"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."
26. There is little doubt that Ananias was a part (and likely even a leader) of the assembly of saints in Damascus.
27. Thus, having been converted, Ananias exhorts him to be baptized and fellowship with the disciples at Damascus.
28. Now, notice how Ananias put it—"Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."
29. (a) In baptism we publicly wash away our sins—water baptism is the public confession that we need forgiveness.
30. This is why baptism is "a baptism of repentance" wherein the person baptized openly confesses his sin.
31. (b) In baptism we publicly call upon the name of the Lord—to call upon the Lord is to believe upon Him.
32. Thus, within water baptism two things are publicly confessed—we are dirty sinners and we are cleansed by Christ.
33. And so, it's not that water baptism actually washes away sin, but because it's so intimately related to that which does (the blood of Christ), the two are conflated.
34. For example, the same is true with regards to the Lord's Supper—because the symbol and reality are so closely connected, our Savior equated them—"This bread is My body and this cup is My blood."
35. Thus, we learn from this text, what the rest of Scripture affirms, baptism symbolizes a saving response to the gospel.
36. This is to say, within water baptism the person baptized confesses his only hope for forgiveness lies in Christ.
37. Put another way, no one should be baptized but those who have been washed by calling upon the Lord.

III. His Calling (vv17-21)

1. V17—"Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance."
2. According to chapter 9:19, after Paul was baptized, he remained in Damascus for some time preaching the gospel.
3. And then, eventually, after a plot by the Jews to kill him was exposed, they snuck him out of the city to Jerusalem.

4. Thus, having left Damascus and returned to Jerusalem, Paul was praying in the temple when Christ visited him in a vision.
5. V18—"Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me."
6. We know from Acts 9, that Paul remained in Jerusalem for a few weeks until the Jews plotted to kill him.
7. And so, here our Savior is warning his newly converted servant, that he needed to leave Jerusalem for a time.
8. Paul's response in vv19-20 reflects his desire to remain in Jerusalem to minister to his fellow Hebrews.
9. VV19-20—"Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him."
10. It's as if he said—"The Jewish leadership within Jerusalem knew who I was and what I did to Christians."
11. I think Paul is suggesting that perhaps, given his previous reputation, the unbelieving Jews would listen to him.
12. V21—"Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles'"—I have work for you to do among the nations.
13. Yes, you will have plenty of opportunity to minister to Jews, but you will largely do so within the nations.
14. And thus, Paul recounts to this mass of unruly Jews, how it was that he became a member of the group he once persecuted.
15. And furthermore, he explained how and why it was that for the past 30yrs he was in distant and pagan lands.

IV. Observations

1. Here I simply want to provide three summary observations derived or taken from this larger passage.
2. (1) The power of a personal testimony—on a number of occasions both in his letters and the book of Acts, Paul recounts his personal testimony.
3. But before I go any further, let me a few brief words about the phrase "personal testimony"—by this I simply mean your personal story as to how and when you became a Christian.
4. While every Christian has a similar testimony (they were brought to trust Christ) each Christian has a unique testimony.
5. Some of us were raised in Christians homes and some of us were not—some of us saved young and others were not.
6. But regardless which of these is more true of you, if you are a Christian you have a personal testimony.
7. Thus, here's the question I want to answer—why? Why would Paul share his personal testimony at least five times in Scripture?
8. (a) It allows us to identify with others—that is, we are able to say to people, by nature I'm no better than you.
9. Brethren, I've said it a thousand times—there's no way I can look down my nose at any sinner in the world.

10. Now this doesn't mean that you have to have actually committed certain sins to witness to certain people.
11. For example, when I worked as the chaplain for the homeless shelter, I had to oversee the chapel services.
12. And there was a Christian College in our town that came a few times a year to conduct the evening service.
13. And at times, the young man that gave the message felt as if he needed to identify with the homeless residents.
14. And so, he would begin by confessing to all the sins he committed—"I once smoked a cigarette or cheated on my test."
15. No brethren, we don't have to embellish our past in order to relate to evil and immoral sinners around us.
16. While you may not be able to relate to certain lifestyles, we all can relate to others as natively born sinners.
17. We are all products of the fall, sons of Adam, objects of God's wrath, sons of Satan, and citizens of the kingdom of darkness.
18. Friends, we don't have to stretch the truth to relate to poor sinners, because we are all from the same family.
19. (b) It gives all the glory to God's grace—that is, the reason we are now Christians is because of His grace.
20. Ps.66:16—"Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul"
Ps.115:1—"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory."
21. If it were not for His redeeming grace, we all would be doing the very things we did before conversion.
22. You say—Well, I was never doing drugs or robbing banks—but you were born as a guilty and filthy sinner.
23. And so, if God never saved you what you be today—a religious hypocrite who remains a guilty and filthy sinner.
24. Dear brethren, we have to remember, Christianity is not a message of self-help which gives us a little strength.
25. Christianity is a message of life to dead souls—it's a message of pardon to guilty sinners—it's a message of reconciliation to estranged souls.
26. (2) The nature of true conversion—by conversion I refer to that radical and wonderful change that God makes in the heart and life of sinners.
27. We have to keep in mind brethren, Acts 22:1-21 is largely a description on how Paul became a Christian.
28. In fact, Paul elsewhere tells us that his conversion was in many ways a pattern for every true conversion.
29. 1Tim.1:16—"However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life."
30. Now, this of course does not mean that every person converted will have an identical conversion as Paul.
31. It's very true dear brethren that not every Christian has a Damascus experience just as Paul (light included).

32. But what Paul means is this, there are basic elements true of my conversion, true of every conversion (let me suggest three).
33. (a) He humbles us—this was seen in Paul in that he brought him to his knees and made him dependent upon others.
34. Paul's problem is our problem—by nature we are proud and take refuge in our native pedigree and morality.
35. John Calvin—"As Paul was puffed up with pharisaic pride it was fitting for him to be thrown to the ground, and, as it were, deflated, so that he might hear Christ's voice."
36. This is the very first thing that must happen—our proud mouths must be closed by the preaching of the law.
37. (b) He reveals Himself to us—this is at the heart of it all—Christ has to reveal Himself to us through His word.
38. He has to make Himself known to us as our Godman Savior and Redeemer: our prophet, priest, and king.
39. Gal.1:15-16—"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood."
40. This is how Paul interprets what happened to him on the road to Damascus—having been separated from his mother's womb and called by grace, he had Christ revealed in him.
41. He came to know Jesus of Nazareth—he came to know Him as One who was dead but now reigns (lives).
42. Thus, in conversion we have a true knowledge of God, in the person of Jesus Christ, revealed within us.
43. 2Cor.4:6—"For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."
44. (c) He unites us together as brethren—this is again illustrated in baptism which is always into the church.
45. No sooner was Paul converted was he given a friend (a brother) in Ananias and the other brethren in Damascus.
46. Yes, it's true the unbelieving Jews now rejected and despised him, but he would find a family among the Christians.
47. Yes brethren, there are many unique aspects to Paul's conversion, but these are three aspects of every conversion.
48. (3) The summons to ministry—here we are reminded that Christ Himself calls and equips men for the ministry.
49. And the glory of it all is—oftentimes Christ chooses the least likely instruments to proclaim His gospel.
50. Gal.1:23—"But they (believers) were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.'"
51. Now the very man that hated the truth now loves the truth, and the one who hated the church now loves the church.
52. And brethren, this is how it is when He calls a man to ministry—He gives him a love for the truth of God and people of God.