

# A Bible Adventure

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## A Rabbi Sees the Light

*A retelling of Acts 5–9*

“May God damn them!” the high priest, Caiaphas, exclaimed. He had been filling the chamber of the Sanhedrin—the Supreme Court of all Judaism—with his curses against Christians. “Just what we feared would take place is now happening! Their doctrine is spreading through Jerusalem like wildfire! And what’s worse, I feel like it’s my fault!”

His father-in-law, Annas, stroked his long white beard. “Come now, son,” he said softly. “Neither we nor any of the elders of the Council had the slightest idea that this heretical sect would continue to spread once we persuaded the Romans to execute their blasphemous leader, Jesus of Nazareth.”

“Yes, yes, I know. But just last week we had the ideal opportunity to rid ourselves of two of their main leaders, Peter and John. We had them arrested and the Council agreed to slay them!”

“Then why didn’t you?”

“Rabbi Gamaliel persuaded the Council otherwise, arguing that we should let them go. He said that if their purpose or their work is merely of man, it will come to nothing. But if it is from God, we will be unable to stop them, and we could very well find ourselves fighting against God!”<sup>1</sup>

“I respect Gamaliel as one of our finest lawyers and doctors

of the law,” said Annas, “but obviously his advice to you was wrong, and the Council made a grave error in releasing those heretics.”

“We *did* whip them,” said Caiaphas, “and threatened them with more severe punishment should they continue preaching in the name of Jesus.”

“But what good did that do?” said Annas. “Their popularity and their numbers are increasing daily, and I’ve heard reports that even many of our own priests are becoming secret followers of this sect! We must act, Caiaphas, and we must act now! If not, all of Jerusalem is going to be proclaiming that dead Nazarene as the Messiah!”

“I agree. Threats, beatings, and imprisonment have been to no avail. We must show them that we are serious. After all, Moses himself commanded that blasphemers and false prophets must be stoned! As you know, however, the Romans forbid us to carry out our own executions.”

“Of course, I know,” said Annas. “But the situation is such that unless we take the law into our own hands and do something immediately, we may never stop this sect. Nevertheless, to avoid trouble from the Romans should they find out that we’ve executed some of these heretics, perhaps we could use some of our brethren who are not directly linked to the Sanhedrin.”



Caiaphas smiled. “An excellent idea! And I know the perfect man for the job—Rabbi Saul! He is a zealous young Pharisee from Tarsus, and one of the chief rulers of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, a very devout congregation here in Jerusalem consisting of Jews from Greece and Asia. He would do anything to further the cause of our religion.”

“I have heard of him,” Annas replied. “His father was also a dedicated Pharisee.”

They immediately summoned Saul to the priests’ quarters at the Temple compound, and he gladly accepted the commission of capturing a prominent Christian and seeing to it that the Christians would be dealt with. Saul agreed that such action would serve as a deterrent to the rest of the Christians in Jerusalem and would hopefully bring a stop to their activities.

After organizing a band of devout Jews from his synagogue, Saul and his men went to Jerusalem’s central marketplace where the Christians frequently preached. There they discovered a disciple named Stephen, who was openly telling the multitudes about Jesus.

They began debating with Stephen, yet they were unable to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke. Therefore, they bribed false witnesses who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemy against Moses and against God.”

This angered those who had been listening to the encounter, and they seized Stephen and brought him to the Council.

“This man continually blasphemes against our Holy Temple and against the Laws of Moses,” the false witnesses proclaimed. “We

have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy our holy place and change the customs which Moses gave us!”

Caiaphas asked Stephen if the accusations were true. Stephen answered with a powerful and detailed recounting of the early history of the Jews—from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to Moses and through their prophets and kings, showing how God had dealt with Israel through the ages, preparing them for the Messiah.

Stephen ended his account, saying, “You stiff-necked in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Ghost! As your fathers did, so do you! Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Messiah, who you have now betrayed and murdered!—You who have received the law, but have not kept it!”<sup>2</sup>

Unable to bear this stinging rebuke, the Council, as well as Rabbi Saul’s mob who had captured Stephen, agreed that this heretic should be stoned immediately.

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed upward toward heaven and saw the glory of God. “Behold!” he cried, “I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of the Father!”<sup>3</sup>

Upon hearing these words, the Council and the mob covered their ears and rushed upon Stephen. Then they dragged him out of the city and stoned him.

Saul had fully consented to Stephen’s death but remained on the outskirts of the crowd. As they prepared to hurl their stones at Stephen, they laid their robes and cloaks down at Saul’s feet.



To their dismay, however, the Sanhedrin discovered that Stephen's death failed to curb or slow down the Christians' activities. They continued growing and spreading their message more than ever. Not only was the Council enraged, but Rabbi Saul himself also became obsessed with exterminating the Christians, and the persecution against them became so violent that most Christians left Jerusalem.

Saul, however, not content with having merely driven most of them out of the capital, continued breathing out murderous threats against the disciples. He even went to the high priest and asked for official letters to the synagogues in Damascus, Syria, authorizing him to bring captive to Jerusalem any Christians that could be found there.

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Years later, Saul wrote and confessed, "I did many

things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Many of the saints I threw into prisons, having received authority from the chief priests. When they were executed, I raised my voice against them and condemned them! I punished them in every synagogue, I compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities."<sup>4</sup>

One day, as Saul and his company of Temple guards traveled by horseback on the dusty road to Damascus, an unexpected and extraordinary event befell him. As they approached the city, a brilliant light from heaven shone down on Saul. He fell from his horse and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"

Although Saul had studied the Scriptures and knew that God often supernaturally

spoke to and called His messengers and prophets, he probably would have never dreamed that anything like this would happen to him!

Astonished and terrified, Saul must have wondered what this blinding light and this voice could possibly mean. If it truly was the voice of God, then why did it say, "Why do you persecute Me?" Surely, God knew that he was on a holy mission for Him to persecute God's enemies, the members of a heretical sect that followed that

troublemaker, Jesus of Nazareth!

Saul addressed the voice aloud, saying, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then came the answer that would radically alter this young Pharisee's life. The voice replied, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

"My God, my God!" he thought as his mind reeled. "Jesus! Jesus is the Lord! Jesus is the Messiah! My God! What have I done! Have mercy upon me, Lord!"





Saul trembled and wept as he addressed the voice again, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

“Arise and go into the city,” the Lord replied. “It shall be told you there what you must do.”

Saul rose to his feet, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. He was blind. His companions led him by the hand into the city of Damascus, where he remained for three days without sight.

The once great and proud Pharisee, the Rabbi Saul, had been supernaturally struck down and knocked off his high horse by Jesus Christ Himself. He was so shaken by the dramatic events that he was unable to eat or drink, but lay in bed pondering,

praying, and waiting for God to reveal more to him.

Three days later, the Lord spoke to a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, saying, “Arise and go to the house where Saul of Tarsus is. Put your hands on him and pray that he regains his sight!”

“But Lord,” Ananias replied, “I have heard from many about this man and how much evil he has done to Your children in Jerusalem. He now has authority from the chief priests to capture and imprison all those who call upon Your name!”

“Obey Me and go to him,” said the Lord, “for he is a chosen vessel who will take My name before many!”

So Ananias went, albeit hesitantly, and as he entered

the room where the rabbi lay, he greeted him. “Brother Saul,” he said.

Saul was dumbfounded. He had encountered many Christians, but none had ever called their heartless persecutor “brother.”

Seeing the pitiful condition of this former tormentor of his people, Ananias felt compassion for him and told him, “Saul, the Lord—even Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you journeyed here—has sent me to pray for you so that you can see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit!”

Ananias then laid his hands over Saul’s eyes and prayed, and immediately Saul’s eyes were healed, and he rose up, ate, and was strengthened.

After spending just a few days with the disciples in Damascus, the Bible says that Saul, who then changed his name to Paul, immediately preached in the synagogues, saying that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were amazed and said, “Isn’t this the one that destroyed those who called on Jesus’ name in Jerusalem? And didn’t he come here to imprison Christians?”

Nevertheless, Paul increased in strength and confounded the Jews that lived in Damascus, proving that Jesus was indeed the Messiah! The thrilling ministry of the apostle Paul was launched!

**Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> [Acts 5:28–42](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Acts 7:51–53](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Acts 7:56](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Acts 26:9–11](#)