

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus.¹

THE BACKGROUND.

At the time of his conversion, Saul was a relatively 'young man',² quite possibly around 30 years of age.³

He had spent the early years of his life in the city of Tarsus,⁴ a place which he later claimed, most accurately, to be 'no mean ('obscure', 'insignificant') city'.⁵ For Tarsus was a great trading centre. It was the chief city of the Roman province of Cilicia, and it was a seat of Greek learning,⁶ being one of the most prestigious university cities of the day.

No doubt, in part at least, Saul owed the ease and proficiency with which he spoke, wrote and thought in Greek to the years he had spent at Tarsus. And it is likely that there Saul became versed in the works of many of the great Greek philosophers and writers, quotations from whom surface both in his later preaching and in his epistles.⁷

Yet 'Saul' was not a Greek name, unlike that of the original addressee of Luke's two volumes.⁸ Saul's name was Jewish. And it is likely that Saul's parents graced him with his name directly or indirectly after the most illustrious member of the tribe from which Saul came, a man who had lived over 1,000 years before, namely Saul, the first king of Israel.⁹

And I note that we owe to Saul of Tarsus himself, in one of his letters, that he did come from the same Israelite tribe as had his famous namesake, namely, the tribe of Benjamin.¹⁰ And I suppose it is fair to see this detail as an example of what we might call the 'undesigned coincidences' of Holy Scripture.¹¹ For Luke, who records Saul's Jewish name over 20 times, says nothing of his tribal origin, whereas he, Saul, who tells us of his tribal origin, never mentions his Hebrew name in any of his many letters which we possess.

But if, in one sense, Saul owed his Jewish name to an ancient king from the same tribe as himself, he owed his sectarian loyalties entirely to his father. For Saul followed in the steps of his father in that he became a Pharisee,¹² the Pharisees being the very strictest of the various Jewish parties.¹³

But Saul owed another debt to his father; he owed to him also his possession of full Roman citizenship,¹⁴ a privilege which was highly prized throughout the Empire¹⁵ and something which was to prove extremely useful to Saul on more than one occasion later in life.¹⁶

Whereas Saul's early days spent at Tarsus doubtless contributed much to his character and to his preparation for the future, the major influence which determined the course of his still relatively young life must be sought elsewhere.¹⁷ For, when the time came for him to pursue his higher education studies, he had not been enrolled at the University of Tarsus, but had been sent to Jerusalem to study 'at the feet' (as the expression is) of one Rabban Gamaliel,¹⁸ 'Rabban' being a more honourable title than 'Rabbi'. Rabban Gamaliel was the most respected Pharisee of his day, one of Israel's most distinguished and gifted teachers, a man highly esteemed by reason of his learning and his character,¹⁹ not to say of his being the grandson of the famous Hillel.

It was from Rabban Gamaliel no doubt that Saul acquired much (i) of his in-depth knowledge of the Old Testament, (ii) of current rabbinical methods of biblical interpretation and (iii) of the traditions of the elders. And in all such subjects Saul had excelled. 'I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation', he later wrote, 'being far more zealous for the traditions of my fathers'.²⁰ Clearly, Saul had been one of Gamaliel's star pupils.

But, though at Gamaliel's feet Saul acquired much of the great man's piety and learning, alas, he imbibed little of Gamaliel's gentleness, tolerance and wisdom, qualities of Gamaliel which we learn, not only from his one recorded speech in Acts 5²¹ but also from Jewish sources. Indeed, I guess that the word 'tolerance' didn't exist in Saul's vocabulary. In this respect, Saul (with his fiery zeal and intolerance) and his teacher were like chalk and cheese.

With his passionate commitment to his Jewish faith and to his convictions as a Pharisee, it was inevitable that, sooner or later, Saul was going to find himself on a collision course with the followers of 'Jesus of Nazareth'²² – followers who already numbered many thousands.²³ As Luke reported prior to the conversion of Saul, 'the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith'.²⁴

And such a collision course was made all the more inevitable by the fact that the leaders of this new movement spoke openly and boldly in the Temple, as they did elsewhere. For this movement (labelled by the Jews as 'the sect of the Nazarenes'²⁵) was not disposed to hide itself away in some corner.²⁶

And it was inevitable that such a man as Saul would be enraged by the claims made by the preachers that this (in his eyes) 'accursed Jesus',²⁷ a 'deceiver',²⁸ rightly and properly executed by the Roman authorities at the insistence of the nation's ruling council, had been raised from the dead and blasphemously declared to be Israel's long awaited Messiah. And, though (as a good Pharisee) never doubting that God could, and would one day, raise the dead,²⁹ enraged Saul most certainly was!

And, when one of their number had the effrontery, not only (as was reported of him) to speak against Moses, God, the Law and the Temple,³⁰ but to charge the supreme council – the Sanhedrin itself – with resisting the Holy Spirit in that they had both betrayed and murdered the One who he (Stephen) declared to be 'the Just One'³¹ ... well, it was more than flesh and blood could stand.

Readily, Saul had then approved the blasphemer's death,³² gladly 'standing by' and 'keeping watch over' the garments of those who killed him,³³ secure in the knowledge that Stephen died in accordance with God's law which required that 'he that blasphemes the name of Jehovah shall certainly be put to death; all the assembly shall certainly stone him'.³⁴

But it was not in young Saul to be content to be a caretaker of clothes!

The death of just one Christian apologist couldn't begin to satisfy the anger which boiled inside. And so, when, following Stephen's death, 'a great persecution' broke out against the church at Jerusalem,³⁵ Saul devoted the whole of his energy (throwing himself, body and soul, with all the intensity of his being) into the offensive. He personally made 'havoc of the church', entering into their houses one by one, dragging off both men and women to prison.³⁶

Luke reports that he 'laid waste' the church, using a word employed elsewhere to describe the ravaging of a victim's body by a wild beast; the Greek Old Testament speaking, for example, of Israel figuratively as the vine which God had brought out of Egypt, says that 'the boar out of the woods uproots it and the wild beast of the field devours (ravages) it'.³⁷ And Saul was like a 'wild beast' tearing apart the church³⁸ until, if he had had his way, nothing recognisable would have remained. And the thoroughness of his effort is underlined by the way in which he burst into the disciples' dwellings, hauling the occupants off to prison.

We noted just now words which Saul wrote of himself much later, how that he had advanced in Judaism beyond many others of his own age, being far more zealous than they for Jewish traditions.³⁹ But, if he outstripped many of his fellow students in his enthusiasm for such matters, he was also clearly determined to outdo them all when it came to persecuting zeal. And he did. For, immediately before writing those words, he had written, 'I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to *destroy* it',⁴⁰ or, as one scholar renders the word, 'I ... *devastated* it'.⁴¹ And so he had, as those who later heard him preach at Damascus were very ready to confirm.⁴²

Saul also later recorded how 'many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death (by which we learn that many others soon followed Stephen into martyrdom), I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme'.⁴³ From which we learn that Saul's crusade against the early church did not stop with imprisonment. For, when the saints were then brought to trial before the Jewish authorities, Saul did everything in his power to make them apostatise by denying the Lord Jesus. And if this failed, and it therefore became an issue of life or death for the prisoner, on every occasion he gave his vote against them.

And yet, no doubt to Saul's intense annoyance, he discovered (as did the Jewish council) that the strategy of harsh and relentless persecution rather backfired on him and on them, for, as Luke noted, 'those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word'.⁴⁴ I suspect that Saul would have done better to heed the advice and counsel of his tutor, Gamaliel, to which the Sanhedrin had earlier listened!⁴⁵ But Saul certainly didn't see it that way.

In his book, that the Nazarene heresy should exist at Jerusalem was bad enough in itself, but then to find that it was now spreading like wildfire, and that much farther afield (not only

through Judea and Samaria,⁴⁶ but as far as Damascus, some 135 miles to the north) was simply intolerable.

And so, predictably, Saul, fuelled by his frenzy of hate, reacted by extending his crusade of persecution. In his own words of 35 years later, 'being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities'.⁴⁷ And, in persecuting the followers of Jesus with all his might and main, he was utterly convinced that in doing so he was doing God's will and work.⁴⁸

And, as part of his crusade 'into foreign cities', his eye settled on Damascus, one of the most ancient cities in the world,⁴⁹ now the capital of Syria, and a strategic location on the main trade route from Egypt around the Fertile Crescent to Mesopotamia. Possibly, Saul regarded Damascus as an obvious escape route for the disciples dispersed from Jerusalem bound for such distant lands as Babylon and Assyria.⁵⁰

Apart from which, there were several synagogues in Damascus itself,⁵¹ together with a sizeable Jewish population, numbering many tens of thousands.⁵² From this source, news had filtered back to Jerusalem that among them there were many members of the (to Saul) cursed sect of the Nazarenes',⁵³ some of whom, having escaped through Saul's net thrown wide in Judea, now doubtless thought themselves safe beyond his murderous attentions.

But, if Saul had his way, he was about to prove them wrong!

And I ought to make it clear that, as I read the data, Saul felt not so much as one moment's compunction or regret over any of the suffering which he inflicted on the early disciples. Indeed, he was not in the slightest bit squeamish about including women in his purge.⁵⁴ Saul shed no tears for his many victims. Alas for Saul, he fell into the category of which our Lord forewarned His disciples just prior to His crucifixion, 'the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service'.⁵⁵

But, you may ask, did Saul have *no* misgivings? Did he entertain *no* doubts about his actions? Were there not some moments when he was haunted, if not by the memory of Stephen's *message*, then at least by the memory of Stephen's *face*? ... if not by the memory of Stephen's *preaching* then at least by the memory of his *prayer*? And what of the well-known words addressed by the glorified Lord Jesus to Saul a little later, 'It is hard for you to kick against the goads'?⁵⁶

Misgivings? Doubts? Haunting memories?⁵⁷ I think not. Frankly, all the evidence (both in the Book of Acts and in Saul's later writings) points in the very opposite direction.

And, personally, I understand our Lord's words concerning kicking against the goads to be His declaration to Saul that all of Saul's violent opposition to Him, to His cause and to His followers, was doomed to failure ... that his resistance would be of no avail⁵⁸ and would result only in hurt to himself ... that it was as futile for him to continue persecuting Him through His people as it was for the ox to kick back against the goads.⁵⁹

We have Saul's own word for the fact that, in all he did, his conscience was clear. 'Paul', Luke records later, 'looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day"'.⁶⁰ I detect no hint of any troubled conscience or any misgivings about his earlier actions there!

At all points, Saul had been scrupulously conscientious. 'I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth' were his words to King Agrippa.⁶¹ And towards the close of his life, when looking back on these very days, he still maintained that, though he had been 'formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man', as he said, 'I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief'.⁶²

I have come across a passage from the pen of a writer of Greek tragedies back in the 5th century BC which brings out well the force of the word-picture which our Lord painted about oxen and goads to Saul a little later. One character in the tragedy speaks to another of that second character's attitude to 'Bromius', the god of noise, 'I would rather do him sacrifice than in a fury kick against the goads; you are a mortal, he is a god'.⁶³ As you see, there is no suggestion in that word picture of stifling any niggling doubts or haunting memories!

You cannot fight, the character in the play is saying, against someone who is a god with any prospect of success. It was a great pity that Saul had not paid more attention to the wise

words of his former teacher, Gamaliel. 'if this plan or this enterprise is of men, it will come to nothing; but *if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it*—lest you even be found to fight against God'.⁶⁴

And so Saul, fiercely determined to do all in his power to devastate and destroy the early church, continued his relentless crusade into 'foreign cities'.⁶⁵

THE BIBLE PASSAGE.

And now, having done our best to think our way into Saul's situation (and, to some extent, into his frame of mind at the time), we leave Doctor Luke to take up the story.⁶⁶

But Saul, yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he drew nigh unto Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven: and he fell upon the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?'

And he said, 'Who art thou, Lord?'

And He said, 'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: but rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do'.

And the men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but beholding no man.

And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing; and they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink.

SAUL'S CONVERSION EXPERIENCE.

Few, if any, would dispute that the conversion of Saul ranks as the most important event which has taken place in the history of the Christian faith since Pentecost. Certainly, it ranked of first importance in the mind of Luke, as witness the fact that he has included no less than three detailed accounts of it; namely, (i) his own telling of the story here in chapter 9 and then two further accounts from the lips of Saul (or Paul) himself, (ii) one before the hostile crowd at Jerusalem in chapter 22 and (iii) the other before King Agrippa at Caesarea in chapter 26.⁶⁷

This three-fold description matches, to some extent, the three-fold description of the conversion of Cornelius which Luke sets out for us in chapters 10, 11 and 15.

And in many respects these two conversions, that of Saul and that of Cornelius, form most important milestones in Luke's record of the spread of the Christian gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. For both these conversions, in different ways, play a central role in the future reaching out of the gospel to the Gentiles:

(i) that of Saul, in that he was, as we read elsewhere, God's chosen vessel to bear the name of the Lord Jesus 'before the Gentiles',⁶⁸ that he was the 'apostle of the Gentiles'⁶⁹ and the 'minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles',⁷⁰ and

(ii) that of Cornelius, in that he and his household were, in effect, the first-fruits of the gospel harvest among the Gentiles.⁷¹

Previously, the gospel had stretched out from Jerusalem to Judea and to Samaria.⁷² But the time had now come for the gospel, in accordance with the Lord's own stated programme, to be taken beyond Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, 'to the end of the earth'.⁷³

And so to **verses 1-2.**

Saul was '**yet**' ('still'), by which word Luke is picking up on his previous reference to Saul 'making havoc of the church',⁷⁴ '**breathing threatening and slaughter**'. It was not that Saul was 'breathing out' anything but that 'threats and murder', were, so to speak, the very

element and atmosphere in which Saul then lived ... they were the very air which he breathed.⁷⁵

'In these excesses Saul was departing from the attitude of his esteemed teacher Gamaliel.⁷⁶ But, as Bruce points out, just as "Stephen saw the logic of the situation more clearly than the apostles, Saul saw it more clearly than Gamaliel". Both Stephen and Saul had realized that the new order and the old were incompatible. Whereas Stephen argued, "The new has come; therefore the old must go", Saul's point was, "The old must stay; therefore the new must go".⁷⁷

And so, Saul, we note, took the initiative. It was not in Saul to wait and see whether he was invited to take up the task. Not Saul. And, therefore, he (not the high priest or the Sanhedrin) climbed into the driving seat of the swoop on Damascus.⁷⁸

And who, we may well ask, was the '**high priest**' to whom Saul submitted his request for written authority to cover his self-chosen deadly mission?⁷⁹

We cannot be absolutely sure, but if, as seems likely, the events of which we are reading took place in AD 35, then – lo and behold! – it would have been none other than Joseph Caiaphas.⁸⁰ Yes, it would have been the same high priest who, a few years before, had presided at our Lord's religious trial.⁸¹ For Caiaphas had enjoyed a remarkably long innings (of 18 years), before receiving 'the Order of the Boot' from the Romans in AD 36.⁸²

'Given the history of his antipathy to Jesus and his followers,⁸³ Caiaphas would have been more than glad to grant the request of the zealous young persecutor of Christians'.⁸⁴

Here lies no small irony. For it had been Caiaphas who, without ever realising it, had once prophesied 'that Jesus would die for the nation, and not *for that nation only*, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad'.⁸⁵ Little did he imagine, when he armed the young Pharisee with the letters for which he had asked, that that young man's subsequent journey to Damascus would lead to his dramatic conversion and to his later carrying the Christian gospel to the Gentiles concerning whom he (Caiaphas) had prophesied!

It is clear, from Saul's later reference to the mission he had undertaken, both (i) that the authority and commission came, not only from the high priest himself but also 'from the chief priests' (that is, with their full backing),⁸⁶ and (ii) that this simply repeated the procedure which he (Saul) had followed earlier at Jerusalem.⁸⁷

In accordance with decrees passed by Julius Caesar and Augustus long before, the high priest and the Sanhedrin exercised jurisdiction over all Jews living abroad.⁸⁸ And, given that many of the disciples at Damascus were likely to have fled there from Jerusalem, the high priest had, therefore, the authority to demand their extradition.

It is worth noting that scholars assure us that, in fulfilling his mission, Saul would have been known as 'an apostle' of the Sanhedrin,⁸⁹ and that 'his carrying of letters from those who commissioned him is fully in line with the custom of giving [apostles] letters of accreditation'.⁹⁰

Verse 3.

The following life-changing event took place, Luke notes, when Saul and his party had almost completed their journey, a journey which would have taken them about a week. Given that the outcome of Saul's encounter with the glorified Jesus would be that he be led, unseeing, into Damascus, it was kind indeed for the Saviour to stage His meeting with Saul for when and where He did.

'**Suddenly there shone** (better, 'flashed', the word Luke used being closely related to the Greek word for lightning) **round about him a light from heaven** ... and not round him only! For, as Saul/Paul himself reported later, 'At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round me *and those who journeyed with me*'.⁹¹

Indeed, I note that the expression, 'shining round', used by Luke when recording Paul's words in Acts 26, is identical to that which he had used to describe the 'glory of the Lord' which '**shone round** the shepherds of Bethlehem on the momentous night of our Lord's birth!⁹² But, on this occasion, it was no mere 'angel of the Lord' who put in an appearance along with the 'the glory of that light' which Saul saw.⁹³

And we can hardly miss the significance of Paul's statement in Acts 26 that the 'light from heaven' outshone the sun 'at midday', for it was then that the glare of the Eastern sun would have been at its brightest and most dazzling. But, as the apostle made clear, the glory of the heaven-sent light surpassed even that.⁹⁴

In all likelihood, the fact that Saul was driving his party on at an hour when Eastern travellers usually rested is an indication of just how keen and zealous he was to get about his self-appointed enterprise.

Verse 4.

'And he fell upon the earth'. Because the journey of Saul and his companions covered around 140 miles, over roads which were both rough and steep in places, many have taken it for granted that Saul and his companions rode horses or mules. But I have to say that, if that was so, there is no hint of it in any of the accounts we possess.

Indeed, to me, such phrases as '*stood speechless*'⁹⁵ and '*led him by the hand*'⁹⁶ seem rather to point to their all having travelled on foot.

'And heard a voice'. Saul later expanded Luke's brief statement: 'When we all had fallen to the ground, I *heard a voice* speaking to me and saying *in the Hebrew language*, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"'⁹⁷ And I was fascinated to learn that, in all three accounts of the vision, the Greek text of Saul's name is a transliteration of the Hebrew name ('Saoul'), whereas, apart from verse 17 (which records the words of Ananias, a Jew), in every occurrence of the name Saul (almost 20 times), Luke uses the normal Greek form of the name. Clearly, Luke was most careful to relate exactly what the Lord Jesus said.⁹⁸

The repetition of the name of a person whom God addresses is quite common in scripture, usually (if not always) to give special emphasis to what is about to be said.⁹⁹

I have been struck with the clear parallel between our Lord's words here and those He had spoken several years before from His cross.¹⁰⁰ If we follow *strictly* the order of the words He used on both occasions, we hear Him (i) begin both with a double address: in the first instance, 'My God, my God', and in the second, 'Saul, Saul', and (ii) then pose a question in both: in the first instance, 'why me did you forsake?', and in the second, 'why me are you persecuting?'

Interestingly, the first was spoken by our Lord when He was on earth to someone in heaven, and the second by our Lord when He was in heaven to someone on earth.

But there was another fairly obvious difference. When speaking from the cross, our Lord quoted words from His Old Testament.¹⁰¹ Whereas, when speaking on the Damascus Road, the words were His own.

I cannot help wondering whether, later, Paul may have linked the calling of his name with the Lord's declaration through Isaiah seven centuries before, 'I have called you by your name, *though you have not known me*'.¹⁰²

And how much His words to the arch-persecutor reveal: '***Why persecutest thou me?***'¹⁰³ For His words speak to us clearly of the wonderful and intimate spiritual union which binds Him, the living Head of His church, to His people and them to Him. And this was a revelation which Saul himself would later expound; for example, 'as the body (the human body, that is) is one', he later taught the Corinthians, 'and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ'.¹⁰⁴ And here, in our Lord's word 'me' on the Damascus Road, lies the germ of the truth that His church is one with Himself.

Ever since His ascension to heaven in chapter 1, the Lord had been out of His disciples' sight. But they had not been out of His, not for one single moment! Truly, to Him, anybody who touched *them* touched 'the apple of His eye'.¹⁰⁵

Verses 5-6.

But I note that, although the glorified Lord will now take the arch-persecutor of His church to task for the sufferings which he was inflicting on members of His *spiritual* body, He had uttered no word of rebuke or complaint to any of those who had inflicted the cruellest and

most excruciating of sufferings on His *physical* body. He had then endured the pain and the agony in silence: 'when He was reviled, (He) reviled not again; when He suffered, (He) threatened not'.¹⁰⁶ What a wonderful Saviour we have!

Because, unlike Stephen,¹⁰⁷ Saul did not recognise the glorified Saviour, he posed his rather predictable question, '**Who are you, Lord?**'¹⁰⁸

To which, no doubt, in stunned amazement, Saul heard the mind-blowing answer, '**I am Jesus**' – or, more fully, as Saul recalled it, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth'.¹⁰⁹

Oh, Saul knew *that* name very well. Right up to this moment, as we noted earlier, Saul had been persuaded that he should do everything in his power to wipe out that very name.¹¹⁰ The man known to all (whether friend or foe, angel or demon) as 'Jesus of Nazareth'¹¹¹ was the very last person Saul could ever have imagined (or confessed) to be 'Lord'!

In terms of a dramatic moment, the nearest biblical parallel of which I can think is that recorded in Genesis 45, when the all-powerful Governor of all Egypt, who then had Jacob's sons entirely at his mercy, announced to them privately, 'I am Joseph'.¹¹² And yet, gigantic bombshell though that undoubtedly was, it was as nothing compared to this!¹¹³

Sometime before, Saul had heard Stephen claim to see Jesus at the right hand of God.¹¹⁴ Now he sees Jesus for himself on the Damascus Road.

At that time, he had heard Stephen speak of the appearance, some 2,000 years before, of 'the God of glory' to 'our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia'.¹¹⁵ And now, 'the Lord of glory' Himself¹¹⁶ 'appears' to *him*.¹¹⁷

And what a privilege this sudden appearance of the Risen and Ascended Lord to Saul was!

We know that, during the 40-day interval between His resurrection and His ascension,¹¹⁸ *the Risen Lord* had appeared on many occasions to many of His disciples, including, on one occasion, in excess of 500 brethren.¹¹⁹ But, as far as we know, *the Ascended Lord* revealed Himself directly to *only three* men: (i) first, as we just noted, to Stephen in the city of Jerusalem;¹²⁰ (ii) now, to Saul on the road outside of Damascus;¹²¹ and, (iii) many years later, to the apostle John on the island of Patmos.¹²²

Verse 7.

'The men that journeyed with him stood speechless (struck dumb, no doubt, with terror) **hearing the voice but beholding no man** ('seeing no one').¹²³

On a later date, Saul/Paul reported to the Jews of Jerusalem that 'those who were with me indeed *beheld the light*, but they *did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me*'.¹²⁴ Clearly then, Saul's travelling companions were fully aware both of the exceedingly bright light¹²⁵ and of the sound of a voice speaking.

But, although they 'beheld the light', they did not, as Saul, see the person of the Lord Jesus¹²⁶ ... and, although they heard a voice-like sound, they did not, as Saul, understand the words spoken.¹²⁷ That is, they neither recognised anyone in the light nor understood what the voice said. They saw only the light, Saul saw the person also; they heard only the sound, Saul heard the articulate speech.

It seems also that, having, as Saul, fallen to the ground when first enveloped by the light,¹²⁸ his companions had risen to their feet while the Lord was speaking to Saul.

Verses 8-9.

But, if Saul's fellow travellers beheld 'no one' when the Lord appeared,¹²⁹ Saul himself saw 'no one'¹³⁰ after the Lord *disappeared*.¹³¹ And to think, that the man now struck physically blind had only just been told that the Lord had appeared to him so that He might send him to the Gentiles 'to open their (spiritual) eyes'.¹³²

We may well contrast (i) blind Saul's then being '**led by the hand**'¹³³ and (ii) blind Elymas 'seeking some to lead him by the hand' on Paul's first missionary journey.¹³⁴ For, unlike Saul's blindness being a mark of God's judgement (as in the case of Elymas), his three-day blindness provided him with time to pause and to reflect.

And what thoughts must have passed through Saul's mind during those three sightless days!

'Jesus of Nazareth was alive. His disciples had been right after all in proclaiming His resurrection from the dead'.¹³⁵

And, if Jesus of Nazareth truly was 'both Lord and Christ',¹³⁶ then for some long time now, he (Saul) had been doing just that which his esteemed teacher had once counselled should never be done ... *he had been fighting against God!*¹³⁷

Saul's world was well and truly turned upside down and inside out. His startling experience on the road to Damascus overturned so much of what he had been taught and what he had believed. In one sense, his whole Old Testament 'had been torn to pieces and put back together in a totally new way ... We call this event a "conversion", but it was more like a volcanic eruption, thunderstorm and tidal wave all coming together'¹³⁸

No doubt, different readers are struck by different details in the passage we are studying.

One commentator I consulted wrote, 'I think when I get to heaven I shall want to know what became of the high priest's letters'.¹³⁹ Personally, I can think of more important details than that! And so too can Jacob Koshy.

But, who, you may well wonder, is Jacob Koshy? Let me tell you a little of his remarkable story.

Jacob Koshy.

Jacob Koshy grew up in Singapore with one driving ambition: to be wealthy. That led him into the world of drugs and gambling, and, eventually, he became the head of an international smuggling network.

In 1980, he was arrested and placed in a government drug rehabilitation prison in Singapore.

Jacob rolled smuggled tobacco in the pages of a Gideon Bible which he had found in his cell. One day, he fell asleep while smoking.

He awoke to find that the cigarette had burned out, and that all that remained was a scrap of charred paper. Jacob unrolled the paper, and read the words: 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

Jacob asked for another Bible, in which he read the full story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Jacob suddenly realised that, if God could reach someone like Saul, then God could reach him too. There in his cell, he knelt and prayed, asking the Lord to come into his life and to change him.

Jacob started sharing his story with the other prisoners, and, as soon as he was released, he became involved in a local church. He met a Christian lady, married, and went on to serve as a missionary in the Far East.¹⁴⁰

And I suspect that Acts 9 verse 4 will always rank highly among Jacob Koshy's favourite Bible texts.

I am reminded of Saul/Paul's own testimony, written towards the close of his earthly life, which has been well paraphrased: 'since I was worse than anyone else, God had mercy on me and let me be an example of the endless patience of Christ Jesus. He did this so that others would put their faith in Christ and have eternal life'.¹⁴¹

And I guess Jacob Koshy would say a loud 'Amen' to that.

Unforeseen changes.

Back now to Acts 9.

No doubt, Saul took many things into account when he first set out for Damascus, not least the length of the journey ahead of him. But, most certainly, he had not reckoned on meeting 'Jesus of Nazareth'¹⁴² before he reached his planned destination!

Nor:

(i) when he first set out, determined as he was to 'apprehend' (to 'arrest') as many followers of Christ at Damascus as he could find, had he supposed that he should himself be 'apprehended' ('arrested') by the living Lord before he ever reached the city gates!

I say 'arrested by the living Lord' deliberately, because, in one of his own letters, he later wrote about this very occasion as the time when 'Christ Jesus ... laid hold of me' (when he 'apprehended' me, when he 'arrested' me).¹⁴³

Well, then, did Augustine speak of Saul's conversion as 'the violent capture of a rebel will'.¹⁴⁴

(ii), when he first set out, had Saul dreamt for one moment that, before ever he reached Damascus, he, an 'apostle' of the Sanhedrin,¹⁴⁵ would already have been told that, in effect, he was to be an 'apostle' of Christ Jesus.¹⁴⁶ Truly, 'the heavenly calling has trumped the original earthly mission'.¹⁴⁷

(iii) when he first set out, had he expected that he, who then already enjoyed dual-citizenship (in that he was a citizen¹⁴⁸ both of Tarsus¹⁴⁹ and of Rome¹⁵⁰), would have added yet another (and a far grander) citizenship to his credit before he entered Damascus. I refer, of course, to his 'citizenship in heaven'!¹⁵¹

(iv) when he set out to inflict suffering on all those in Damascus who called on and who loved the name of Jesus,¹⁵² had he the slightest idea that he would soon be shown that he himself would suffer 'many things' on behalf of that very name¹⁵³ – sufferings which few, if any, would ever come close to matching.¹⁵⁴ No, indeed, when he left Jerusalem, he had no idea that Saul the persecutor would one day become Paul the persecuted.

(v) when he set out, did he imagine that, following his encounter with Jesus, he would come to count as 'loss' and as 'dross' all those things which he had always counted 'gain' to him.¹⁵⁵

(vi) when he set out for Damascus as the high priest's respected representative and envoy, did he expect, humbled, to be guided as a blind man to the house of his host, as helpless as a child.¹⁵⁶ And that, instead of leading others *out* of the city as his captives, he should be led *into* the city as the captive of Jesus Christ. ...

(vii) when he set out for Damascus, carrying letters from *the chief priests at Jerusalem*, authorising him to take captive any Jewish Christians he found there, did he imagine that the day would come when he would carry a letter from *Christian apostles and elders at Jerusalem* to the cities of Derbe, Lystra and Iconium, declaring the freedom of Gentile Christians from having to keep the Law of Moses for salvation.¹⁵⁷

(viii) when he set out for Damascus, would he have believed it possible that that the day would come when he, then a major driving force in the persecution of the early church, would himself be branded as 'a ringleader' of that very movement.¹⁵⁸

(ix) when he set out for Damascus, would he have believed that he, who had recently stood by and witnessed the stoning of Stephen, would one day himself be stoned in the same cause¹⁵⁹ but that, unlike Stephen, he would live to tell the story!¹⁶⁰

I don't doubt that, when Saul set out on his historic journey, he could recall the main charges levelled against Stephen during his trial; namely, that he (Stephen) did not 'cease to speak blasphemous words against' the Temple 'and the law'.¹⁶¹ But we can be sure, that, if Saul could recall the charges against Stephen, he would never have dreamt that, some 25 years later, the very same charges would be laid at his own door.¹⁶²

But of all these then-future developments, of course, Saul had known nothing when he left Jerusalem.

Indeed, as far as his future was concerned, even when led by the hand into Damascus, he knew only that *some* kind of ministry lay in store for him among the Gentiles¹⁶³ and that he was shortly to be told what he was to do.¹⁶⁴

And so, for three long days as it turned out,¹⁶⁵ all he could do, in the physical darkness occasioned by 'the glory of the light' he had seen on the road,¹⁶⁶ was (i) to pray and, now 'under new management', (ii) to await further instructions.¹⁶⁷

The Appendix.¹⁶⁸

Notes

¹ 'There are ten special scriptures which bear upon the conversion of Saul, and most of them upon his call to the apostleship. The accounts given are as follows: (1) By Luke, Acts 9:1-9, A.D. 36; (2) by Barnabas, Acts 9:26-28, A.D. 39; (3) by Paul at Corinth, Galatians 1:15-16, A.D. 57; (4) by Paul at Ephesus, 1 Corinthians 15:8-10, A.D. 57; (5) by Paul at Corinth, Romans 7:7-25, A.D. 58; (6) by Paul at Jerusalem, Acts 22:1-16, A.D. 59; (7) by Paul at Caesarea, Acts 26:1-19, A.D. 60; (8) by Paul at Rome, Philippians 3:4-14, A.D. 62; (9) by Paul in Macedonia, 1 Timothy 1:12-16, A.D. 67; (10) by Paul at Rome, 2 Timothy 1:9-12, A.D. 68', B. H. Carroll, 'Acts', chapter XVII, 'Saul's Conversion'.
'Conversion is ... an appropriate way to describe a central component of Paul's experience. Although Paul was not converted to another religion, he was converted to a new way of life and thinking', Craig Keener, 'Acts: an Exegetical Commentary', page 1615.

² Acts 7. 58.

³ Paul's statement that, 'when they were put to death, I gave my vote against them', Acts 26. 10, is not conclusive evidence that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. Scholars are divided in their opinions:

(i) 'Since, however, Paul is talking about his activity in Jerusalem, membership of the supreme Sanhedrin is no doubt indicated', I. Howard Marshall, 'Acts (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)', page 393.

(ii) 'It is extremely unlikely that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. Granted, he came from a wealthy family; but it was also a Hellenist family, and most of the elders of the Sanhedrin came from aristocratic Judean (and very often priestly) families. He was too young to hold such a respected position and was probably not yet married, and his occasions of being forced to boast about his background do not list this qualification (although one notes that he was advancing far in his age-group, Gal 1. 14)', Craig Keener, 'Acts', Volume 4: 'Acts 26. 9-11: Paul's vote'.

'His statement that he cast his vote against those who were put to death has led some to conclude that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, where such a vote may have been taken. But he was too young to be a member of the Sanhedrin at that time', Ajith Fernando, 'Acts: The NIV Application Commentary', pages 595. We cannot, therefore, base an estimate of Saul's age on any age-requirement for membership of the Sanhedrin.

⁴ Acts 9. 11; 21. 39; 22. 3.

⁵ Acts 21. 39.

⁶ 'They of Tarsus are much addicted to the study of philosophy, and excel Athens and Alexandria, and every other place where there are schools of philosophy ... Rome is best able to inform us what number of learned men this city has produced, for it is filled with persons from Tarsus and Alexandria', Strabo, 'Geography', 14. 5, 12-15.

⁷ Acts 17. 28; 1 Cor. 15. 32-33; Titus 1. 12.

⁸ Theophilus (meaning 'loved {or 'friend'} of God'), Luke 1. 3; Acts 1. 1.

⁹ 1 Sam. 9. 1-2.

¹⁰ Phil. 3. 5.

¹¹ In the spirit of J. J. Blunt's apologetic volume, 'Undesigned Coincidences in the Writings both of the Old and New Testament' (1847).

¹² Acts 23. 6.

¹³ Acts 26. 5.

¹⁴ Acts 22. 28.

¹⁵ Acts 16. 21.

¹⁶ Acts 16. 37-39; 22. 25-29.

¹⁷ 'Rarely in history has any man been fitted for his vocation in life, alike by outward circumstances and by mental and moral equipment, as was St. Paul:

(i) Born at Tarsus, a populous commercial city, thronged with sailors and merchants and students from all parts of the world, reproducing in itself the varied civilizations of the age, he learnt to understand life under different aspects, to look with tolerance on diverse customs, to adapt himself, as no Palestinian Jew could have done, to men of every class and race.

(ii) Born of Jewish parents, who were Hellenists by accident, not by conviction, to whom distance from the Holy City only made fidelity to Judaism more imperative, he early learnt the treasure committed by God to the Jewish people, and grew up a Hebrew of Hebrews (Phil. 3. 5).

(iii) Though he did not receive a Greek education, which the strict Hebrews regarded as grossly immoral, he yet breathed in his boy hood a Greek atmosphere, and learnt to speak with facility the language which afterwards enabled him to preach without an interpreter wherever he went.

(iv) Sent at an early age to Jerusalem to be trained under Gamaliel as a doctor of the Law, he gained a profound knowledge of the Scriptures, and an intimate acquaintance with the system of the Pharisees, which were invaluable to him later in coping with Judaizing opponents.

(v) The possession of the Roman citizenship gave him a recognized position, and afforded him protection, in every part of the Empire.

(vi) *Nor was it an accident that the future Apostle to great cities was a tent-maker of Tarsus, and not a Galilean fisherman.* The craft by which the other Apostles earned their livelihood in youth could not be pursued everywhere. The trade which gave to Paul his sturdy independence could be plied wherever he went, since, owing to the mode of travelling in the East, there was a permanent demand for tents.

... as a Hebrew of Hebrews, yet a Hellenist and a Roman citizen, he combined in himself, as no other single man has ever done, the three great nationalities of the ancient world', W. M. Furneaux, *'The Acts of the Apostles'*, pages 122-123.

For further information about Paul's preparation for his Christian work, see J. B. Lightfoot, *'Biblical Essays'*, pages 201-211.

¹⁸ Acts 22. 3.

¹⁹ Acts 5. 34.

²⁰ Gal. 1. 14.

²¹ Acts 5. 35-39.

²² Acts 26. 9.

²³ Acts 2. 41; 4. 4.

²⁴ Acts 6. 7.

²⁵ Acts 24. 5; cf. Acts 28. 22.

²⁶ Acts 26. 26.

²⁷ 1 Cor. 12. 3.

²⁸ Matt. 27. 63.

²⁹ Acts 23. 6-8.

³⁰ Acts 6. 11, 13.

³¹ Acts 7. 51-52.

³² Acts 8. 1.

³³ 'I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him', Acts 22. 20.

The following quotation offers an interesting slant on the words, 'the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul', Acts 7. 58:

'In the latest issue of Expository Times (vol 123, 2012, pp. 113-18), Brice Jones offers an intriguing (and to my mind fully plausible) proposal for the meaning of the curious action of the crowd involved in the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 7. 58 ... Jones points to several instances in other ancient literature where people take off their cloaks before engaging in a fight or some other violent action. As he puts it, the message of the action in these texts seems to be: "The coats are off; it's about to get messy!"

'More specifically, Jones offers two proposals. First, the depiction of the crowd in Acts 7. 58 laying down their cloaks at Saul's feet probably means that Saul is depicted as "the ring leader of the mob", the one who prompted the stoning by the crowd. Secondly, Brice judges that the motif of removing the cloak here and elsewhere should be understood as an ancient gesture indicating impending actions of a combative or violent nature.

'I find his case persuasive, except on one point: It's not quite accurate to describe the crowd as a "mob". In an important (but often overlooked) study, Torrey Seland traced references in ancient literature to the "Phinehas" episode (Numbers 25. 6-13) and the succeeding tradition of "Phinehas zeal", which involved situations in which devout Jews were entitled (indeed, directed) to take violent action against fellow Jews who openly flouted Torah in some major way ... Seland proposes that in Acts 7 we have, not a lynch mob, but an instance of this kind of semi-judicial ("vigilante") action. This actually chimes nicely with Jones's proposal that Saul is presented as instigating and in some sense authorizing the stoning of Stephen in this scene', Larry Hurtado, '*Cloaks and Violence: A New Proposal on Acts 7. 58*', accessed at ... <http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2012/02/07/cloaks-and-violence-a-new-proposal-on-acts-758/>.

³⁴ Lev. 24. 16; Deut. 17. 17.

³⁵ Acts 8. 1-4. 'It almost seems as if Paul led more people to Christ as a Pharisee than as an apostle! The Lord was able to use persecution to get the eyewitnesses of the resurrection out the door', D. B. Wallace, '*The Great Commission, Part 2: Historical Setting*', accessed at ... <http://danielbwallace.com/2014/02/22/the-great-commission-part-2-historical-setting/>.

³⁶ Acts 8. 3.

³⁷ Psa. 80. 13.

³⁸ Jacob's prophetic description of his youngest son, 'Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf' (Gen. 49. 27), was certainly fulfilled in the person of the most famous of Benjamin's descendants.

³⁹ Gal. 1. 14.

⁴⁰ Gal. 1. 13.

⁴¹ J. B. Lightfoot, 'Galatians', on Gal. 1. 13.

⁴² Acts 9. 21 (the same word as in Gal. 1. 13).

⁴³ Acts 26. 10-11.

⁴⁴ Acts 8. 4.

⁴⁵ Acts 5. 38-39.

⁴⁶ Acts 8. 1.

⁴⁷ Acts 26. 11. From which it appears that Damascus was but one among several cities to which Saul had gone on his errand of oppression.

⁴⁸ Acts 22. 1.

⁴⁹ Gen. 14. 15.

⁵⁰ 'Christianity has already spread as far as Damascus, an important city 135 miles north-northeast of Jerusalem. This is the first city outside the land of Israel to be noted as having Christians', Darrell L. Bock, '*Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*', Acts 9. 1-2.

⁵¹ Acts 9. 20.

⁵² As many as eighteen thousand were massacred there by the Romans in A.D. 66; see Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book VII, chapter 8, paragraph 7.

⁵³ Acts 24. 5.

⁵⁴ Acts 8. 3; 9. 2; 22. 4.

⁵⁵ John 16. 2.

⁵⁶ Acts 26. 14.

⁵⁷ 'Perhaps he recalled the fortitude and face of Stephen, attempting to smother such troublesome memories and niggling thoughts in a more intense whirl of persecuting activity'. 'It was probably in large measure to stifle this ... impression that Paul threw himself so furiously into the campaign of repression', F F Bruce, *The New International Commentary on Acts*, page 491. 'Perhaps', Mr Bruce wrote, but I can see not one shred of evidence in either the Book of Acts or in any of Paul's later epistles of any such attempts to smother or stifle any painful memories or any misgivings ... indeed the very contrary.

⁵⁸ 'His resistance would be of no avail. He was in the hands of One stronger than himself. God had other plans for him than those which he had marked out for himself. "The goad", that is, was not any inward misgiving, but was external to him - the purpose of God concerning him', W. M. Furneaux, *op. cit.*, page 120.

⁵⁹ Clearly an allusion to the action of an unbroken bullock, which, when pricked by the goad, and in ignorance of the consequences, kicks back, only to receive another wound, experiencing further pain and hurt, instead of quietly submitting, as it must do at last. This was a very common saying or proverb, found in many of the ancient Greek writings. (For examples, see F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary (NICGT)*, page 501.)

Not that I am suggesting that the glorified Lord was quoting from one of the Greek classics! The saying was 'often used by the Greeks to express the futility of striving against fate or against the gods, and its meaning to Paul on the Damascus road was that it was now futile for him to try any longer to work against Christ as it would be for an ox to kick against the ploughman's goad', Daniel P. Fuller, *Hermeneutics (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary)*, VIII. 9.

⁶⁰ Acts 23. 1.

⁶¹ Acts 26. 9.

⁶² 1 Tim. 1. 13.

⁶³ This passage comes from the pen of Euripides ('The Bacchantes'). Dionysus speaks to Pentheus concerning Bromius (the god of noise), 'I would rather do him sacrifice than in a fury kick against the goads; you are a mortal, he a god'. (Accessed at ... <http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/bacchan.html>.)

⁶⁴ Acts 5. 38-39; cf. 2 Chron. 13. 12 ('do not fight against the Lord ...for you shall not prosper'), 15-16.

⁶⁵ Acts 26. 11.

⁶⁶ Acts 9. 1-9 (Revised Version).

⁶⁷ 'While in classical literature reports of messages given to messengers were generally repeated verbatim on their delivery, there was a preference for variation in reporting in the rhetorical style of Luke's day. This made repeated narratives more interesting to read', Ajith Fernando, *op.cit.*, pages 294-295 – referencing Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, page 347.

⁶⁸ Acts 9. 15.

⁶⁹ Rom. 11. 13.

⁷⁰ Rom. 15. 16.

⁷¹ 'In Acts 9. 1-30 we have the account of Saul's conversion and of his first preaching among the Jews. In Acts 9. 31-43 we have the last account of the state of the Jewish churches. Acts 10. 1-18 provides the account of the first fruits of the Gentiles-Cornelius and his household. There is an obvious design in the order in which these events occurred and in which they are narrated. The time was drawing near when the Gentiles should be admitted, an apostle was raised up to preach to them. He was a Jew and his conversion is given as a part of the history of the Jewish Church, but it is an immediate preparation for the extension of Christ's Church. Before arriving at that point however, we have to take our farewell of the Jewish Churches (i.e. the churches of the circumcision in Judaea and Samaria). The prospect is cheering. Internally, there is the picture of unanimity and trust in God, externally they enjoy peace (cf. Acts 9. 31; 'the church had rest'), J. B. Lightfoot, *The Acts of the Apostles: volume 1*, page 148.

⁷² Acts 8. 1, 14.

⁷³ Acts 1. 8. Indeed, there is some evidence that, at the time, the expression 'the end ('the extremity', 'the uttermost part') of the earth' referred in particular to the city of Rome. I note that Psalm 8 in the apocryphal book known as 'the Psalms of Solomon' (which poems do not date back to the days of King Solomon but were penned sometime around the middle of the first century B.C.) speaks of God as having 'brought him from the end of the earth, who strikes mightily; he declared war against Jerusalem', Psa.. Sol. 8. 15-20, accessed at ... <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/31-pssal-nets.pdf>]

The mighty warrior in view is Pompey, the great *Roman* general, suggesting strongly that 'the end ('the extremity') of the earth' from which he came was nowhere other than the city of Rome.

'Psa. Sol. 8. 15 ... shows that in the Jewish mind-set 'ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς' ('the ends of the earth') is a reference to Rome, and so Paul is indeed the servant/witness who proclaims the good news to the ends of the earth so those who are there may turn and be saved (Isa. 45. 22). Hence, Paul is seen at the end of Acts 28 as proclaiming this good news for some two years unhindered, even though most Jews are unconvinced and only gentiles in the main are responding', Ben Witherington III, *Paul and the Heritage of Israel- Part Five*, accessed at ... <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2013/02/25/paul-and-the-heritage-of-israel-part-five/>.

'The collection of eighteen Greek poems that comprise the Psalms of Solomon recount one unknown Jewish community's response to a series of military attacks and political persecutions during the first century B.C.E. ... Psalm of Solomon 8 described Pompey's arrival. Most of this psalm is a hymn of supplication for aid from God to deliver the author's community from the present Gentile invasion (8. 23-34). The allusions within this psalm also match Pompey's siege of Jerusalem. Since the psalmist was distressed at the recent arrival of Gentile forces in Jerusalem, Psalm of Solomon 8 must have been written shortly following Pompey's arrival in 63 B.C.E.' accessed at ... <https://sites.uni.edu/atkinson/cvdocuments/books.html>.

I doubt very much that it is a coincidence, therefore, that Luke, who records in his *first* chapter our Lord's stated programme of having witness borne to Him 'to the end of the earth' should conclude his record of 'witnessing' concerning the kingdom of God and of the spread of the gospel with recording how the message reached that very city (Rome) in his last chapter.

⁷⁴ Acts 8. 3.

⁷⁵ (i) 'ἐμπνέων seems to mean to "inhale"; "breathe"; "draw in breath"; but not "to breathe upon": hence: 1) to inspire, 2) to breathe', J. B. Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, page 149.

(ii) 'empneo (ἐμπνέω, 1709), lit., "to breathe in, or on", is used in Acts 9:1, indicating that threatening and slaughter were, so to speak, the elements from which Saul drew and expelled his breath', W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, page 79.

⁷⁶ Acts 5. 34-40.

⁷⁷ Ajith Fernando, *op. cit.*, page 295, referencing F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, page 70.

⁷⁸ 'The Way' as a description of the early Christians seems to have lasted only so long as Christianity was considered to be a form or branch of Judaism.

⁷⁹ 'It may not have been natural for a loyal Pharisee like Paul to go and request letters from the Sadducean high priest. This is an indication of the extremes he was willing to go', Ajith Fernando, *op. cit.*, page 295.

- ⁸⁰ 'Saul pursues the disciples even beyond Jerusalem and obtains authority for doing so (probably from Caiaphas); Acts 22. 5; 26. 10', Darrell L. Bock, *op. cit.*, Acts 9. 1-2. 'Caiaphas was probably still in office'. F. F. Bruce, *ibid.*, page 196.
- ⁸¹ Matt. 26. 57; John 18. 24.
- ⁸² 'Caiaphas was the surname of Joseph (Josephus, Ant. 18. 35, 95), son-in-law to Annas according to John 18. 13. He was appointed high priest by Valerius Gratus, prefect of Judaea, in A.D. 18 and held the office for the remarkably long term of eighteen years, which included the ten years of Pilate's administration. He was deposed at last by L. Vitellius (who as legate of Syria visited Judaea at the time of Pilate's recall in A.D. 36) and replaced by Jonathan, son of Annas', F. F. Bruce, *'The Book of Acts (New International Commentary on the New Testament)'*, page 119, Kindle Locations 4105-4109.
- ⁸³ See Acts 4. 6.
- ⁸⁴ Clinton E. Arnold, *'Acts (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary)'*, page 134.
- ⁸⁵ John 11. 52.
- ⁸⁶ Acts 26. 12. The 'chief priests' included ex-high priests and members of the high priestly families. Authority was formally vested in the high priest. 'Rome granted this level of authority to the high priest for dealing with internal matters. The precedent was set by a letter that the Roman proconsul wrote much earlier to the ruler of Egypt: "Therefore if any pestilent men have fled to you from their country, hand them over to Simon the high priest, that he may punish them according to their law" (1 Macc. 15. 21). This right was upheld by Julius Caesar and is now applied by the high priest to stop the new pestilence that has spread all the way to the frontier-land of Damascus', Clinton E. Arnold, *ibid.*, page 134.
- ⁸⁷ 'I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests', Acts 26. 10.
- ⁸⁸ 'Julius Caesar and Augustus had granted the high priest and Sanhedrin jurisdiction over Jews in foreign cities', A. T. Robertson, *'Word Studies'*, on Acts 9. 2.
- ⁸⁹ 'With the later Jews ... it would appear also with the Jews of the Christian era, the word ['apostle'] was in common use. It was the title borne by those who were despatched from the mother city by the rulers of the race on any foreign mission ... After the destruction of Jerusalem the "Apostles" formed a sort of council about the Jewish patriarch, assisting him in his deliberations at home, and executing his orders abroad', J. B. Lightfoot, *'Galatians'*, page 93.
- ⁹⁰ K. H. Rengstorf, *'Theological Dictionary of the New Testament'*, volume 1, page 417.
- ⁹¹ Acts 26. 13.
- ⁹² Luke 2. 9.
- ⁹³ Acts 22. 11.
- ⁹⁴ It was a 'heavenly vision', Acts 26. 19. As a *public* experience and event, it stands in contrast to the Lord's appearance to Ananias and to Saul in *private* visions shortly after, Acts 9. 10, 12.
- ⁹⁵ Acts 9. 7.
- ⁹⁶ Acts 9. 8.
- ⁹⁷ Acts 26. 14.
- ⁹⁸ 'To his Jewish mind, the light from heaven would no doubt seem to be manifestly divine, and his first thought may have been that God was honouring him with His endorsement of his plan to exterminate the Nazarenes. It must have come to him with startling and painful surprise that the voice speaking from heaven to him should be the voice of Jesus of Nazareth'.

⁹⁹ Compare the seven occasions when men or women were addressed with 'double names' by the Lord:

- (i) 'Abraham, Abraham' Genesis 22. 11
- (ii) 'Jacob, Jacob' Genesis 46. 2
- (iii) 'Moses, Moses' Exodus 3. 4
- (iv) 'Samuel, Samuel' 1 Samuel 3. 10
- (v) 'Martha, Martha' Luke 10. 41
- (vi) 'Simon, Simon' Luke 22. 31
- (vii) 'Saul, Saul' Acts 9. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Matt. 27. 46.

¹⁰¹ Psa. 22. 1

¹⁰² Isa. 45. 4.

¹⁰³ Persecuting and opposing Jesus was an extremely serious charge; He Himself had warned previously, 'the one who rejects me rejects Him who sent me', Luke 10. 16.

¹⁰⁴ 1 Cor. 12. 12; cf. 1 Cor. 12. 27; Eph. 1. 23; 5. 30; Col. 1. 18, 24; 2. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Zech 2. 8.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Pet. 2. 23.

¹⁰⁷ Acts 7. 56.

¹⁰⁸ Whatever the nuance Saul intended by 'Lord' in that split second (possibly little more than a title of respect), he very soon came to realise that the Jesus he instinctively addressed in that manner was Lord in the fullest and highest sense of the term.

¹⁰⁹ Acts 22. 8.

¹¹⁰ Acts 26. 9.

¹¹¹ Matt. 26. 71; Mark 1. 24; 10. 47; 14. 67; 16. 6; Luke 4. 34; 18. 37; 24. 19; John 1. 45; 18. 5, 7; 19. 19; Acts 2. 22; 6. 14; 10. 38.

¹¹² Gen. 45. 3-4.

¹¹³ A third dramatic moment of recognition which resulted from the simple declaration of a name is recorded in John 20, when the supposed 'Gardener' called Mary Magdalene by her name, John 20. 16.

¹¹⁴ Acts 7. 55-56.

¹¹⁵ Acts 7. 2.

¹¹⁶ 1 Cor. 2. 8.

¹¹⁷ Acts 9. 17 (the same Greek word translated 'appeared' (*επιφανομαι*) as is used in connection with 'the God of glory' in Acts 7. 2..

¹¹⁸ Acts 1. 3.

¹¹⁹ 1 Cor. 15. 4-7.

¹²⁰ Acts 7. 55-56.

¹²¹ Acts 9. 17.

¹²² Rev. 1. 10-20.

¹²³ Compare: (i) 'You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice', Deut. 4. 12, and (ii) 'I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men that were with me saw not the vision', Dan. 10. 7.

¹²⁴ Acts 22. 9.

¹²⁵ Acts 26. 13.

¹²⁶ 1 Cor. 9. 1: 'Am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?'

¹²⁷ Compare John 12. 28-29, 'Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again". Therefore, the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him".'

¹²⁸ 'When we all had fallen to the ground', Acts 26. 14.

¹²⁹ Acts 9. 7.

¹³⁰ Literally 'nothing'.

¹³¹ Acts 9. 8a. Paul later explained the reason for his loss of sight: 'I could not see for the glory of that light', Acts 22. 11.

'Although his companions had seen the light and fallen to the ground [Acts 22. 9; 26. 13], they evidently recovered immediately (Acts 9. 7); they were merely temporarily blinded by light, and had not seen a vision', I. Howard Marshall, '*Acts (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*', volume 5, on Acts 22. 11. It may well be that the light immediately around Saul, Acts 22. 6, was brighter than that around his travelling companions, Acts 22. 9; 26. 13.

¹³² Acts 26. 18.

¹³³ Acts 9. 8b.

¹³⁴ Acts 13. 11.

¹³⁵ E. F. Harrison, '*Interpreting Acts: The Expanding Church*', page 159.

¹³⁶ Acts 2. 36.

¹³⁷ Acts 5. 39.

¹³⁸ N. T. Wright, '*Acts for Everyone: Part 1*', pages 140-142.

¹³⁹ G. Campbell Morgan, '*Acts*', page 179.

¹⁴⁰ The last I read of Mr Koshy he was still telling people, 'Who would have believed that I could find the truth as a result of smoking the Word of God?'

The story in the main text is more-or-less reproduced from the article, '*Jacob Koshy, "From Smoking the Word to Speaking the Word"*', 'Gideon Testimonies from International Extension Countries', The Gideons International (1994), pages 59-60.

See also <http://echristian.wordpress.com/2008/01/19/cross-walk-in-step-with-jesus/> ('A New Direction) and

http://www.sermonnotebook.org/new%20testament/Mark%205_1-20.htm ('Introduction').

I have no reason to doubt the genuineness of Mr Koshy's story. But I am much less confident about a similar story associated with the name of Gaylord Karbarami. See the Appendix at Note 167 below.

¹⁴¹ 1 Tim. 1. 16 (Contemporary English Version).

¹⁴² Acts 22. 8.

¹⁴³ Phil. 3. 12.

¹⁴⁴ 'Augustine called Paul's conversion. "the violent capture of a rebel will"', Charles Swindoll, '*Paul: a Man of Grace and Grit*', page 22.

'Augustine's own famous garden conversion in 386 CE led him to read Saul's conversion as God's "violent capture of a rebel will"', M. B. Dinkler, '*Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Acts of the Apostles*', page 341.

¹⁴⁵ See notes 88 and 89 above.

¹⁴⁶ Acts 26. 15-17: 'I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting ... I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send (*apostello*) you'.

For the description, 'apostle of Jesus Christ/Christ Jesus', see 1 Cor. 1. 1; 2 Cor. 1. 1; Eph. 1. 1; Col. 1. 1; 1 Tim. 1. 1; 2 Tim. 1. 1; and Tit. 1. 1.

¹⁴⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *op. cit.*, on Acts 9. 5-6.

- ¹⁴⁸ Also a citizen of Israel; Gentiles are ‘aliens from the citizenship of Israel’, Eph. 2. 12.
- ¹⁴⁹ Acts 21. 39.
- ¹⁵⁰ Acts 22. 27-28.
- ¹⁵¹ Phil. 3. 20.
- ¹⁵² Acts 9. 14; 26. 9.
- ¹⁵³ Acts 9. 16.
- ¹⁵⁴ 2 Cor. 11. 23-27.
- ¹⁵⁵ Phil. 3. 7-8.
- ¹⁵⁶ ‘Saul had come to “lead” Jesus’s followers “bound” from Damascus as captives (Acts 9.2, 21), but he, now vanquished, must be “led by the hand” and “led into” Damascus (Acts 9. 8)’, Craig Keener, *op. cit.*, page 1641.
‘He who had fancied himself able to guide others had himself to be guided, like a helpless child’, W. M. Furneaux, *op. cit.*, page 129.
- ¹⁵⁷ Acts 15. 23, 30; 16. 4.
- ¹⁵⁸ Acts 24. 5.
- ¹⁵⁹ Acts 14. 19; 2 Cor. 11. 25.
- ¹⁶⁰ Acts 14. 20.
- ¹⁶¹ Acts 6. 13.
- ¹⁶² ‘This is the man, that teaches all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place’, Acts 21. 28.
- ¹⁶³ Acts 26.17-18.
We might say that Acts 26. 13-19 records (i) the conversion, (ii) the call and (iii) the commissioning of the apostle Paul.
- ¹⁶⁴ Acts 9. 6. At this stage, he didn’t even know whether his blindness would prove permanent.
We can compare Saul’s question, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ (Acts 22. 10), with the questions posed by the crowd, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ (Acts 2. 37) and of the Philippian jailor, ‘Sirs, what must I do...?’ (Acts 16. 30) – where the same Greek word (‘ποιέω’) is translated ‘do’ in each case.
- ¹⁶⁵ Acts 9. 9.
- ¹⁶⁶ Acts 22. 11.
- ¹⁶⁷ ‘His original journey to Damascus was never completed. Its goal abandoned, it became an altogether different kind of journey, as the once brilliant, energetic initiator, Saul, now blinded and led by the hand, shuffled his way into Damascus, under new management to await instructions’, David Gooding, ‘*True to the Faith*’, page 141.
‘By telling Saul to enter the city and await further instructions, Jesus is also indicating that He has matters in place already in Damascus. Jesus already knew arrangements for the Passover meal (Luke 22.10–12), and His disciples found it as he had promised (Luke 22. 13); He knew arrangements for the donkey for the triumphal entry (Luke 19. 30–31), and His disciples found it as He had promised (Luke 19. 32). So here Jesus sends Saul into the city, where he will find the situation to be as Jesus promised’, Craig Keener, *op. cit.*, page 1638.

