

22T01b Tough Questions? – Saul or Paul?

Hello my friends. Thanks for joining me today for an @ the PUNLA coffee table.

Even if you have been a Christian for a long time, there are some things in the bible and in the traditions of the modern church that are tough to understand. I find many of these downright confusing. Some of these have troubled me for years.

We want to ask those “tough questions” and then do the research to see if we can find or develop a better understanding for these “tough questions”.

Today, I want to talk about one church traditions. I’ve heard it said that Jesus changed the name of Saul the accuser to Paul the apostle on the road to Damascus. As with many church traditions, they sound good and even logical but are they based on Biblical fact or are they extra biblical or non-biblical. Now I know you may have heard a variation of this, so let’s look and find out what the bible says.

Let’s pray. Heavenly Father please guide our discussion today. Help me to stay out of the way, so you can use me. We trust you and we know you have promised the wisdom we need to understand your word in the Bible. Help us to let the Holy Spirit lead us and guide us. Bless our time together and I pray all these things in your name Lord Jesus. Amen.

The first mention of Saul of Tarsus is during the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:58. If you are not familiar with this story it begins in Acts 6 where we learn about Stephen, the accusation against him, trial and stoning. And this story ends with Acts 7:58. Let’s read it. *⁵⁸and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

So, this is the first mention of Saul, then His story continues in Acts 8:1-3 with Saul persecuting the Church, then the believers are scattered due to this persecution by Saul and others. Saul enters the story again in Acts 9. Let’s read the account of the Damascus Road, Acts 9:1-9 *¹Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” ⁵And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” ⁶So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” ⁷And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. ⁸Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led*

him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

So, okay this is the big event. Jesus literal stops Saul in his tracks. We know Jesus is calling Saul by name. Saul, Saul, Jesus says. No mention of a miraculous renaming here. Let's read on Acts 9:10-19 *¹⁰Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. ¹²And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." ¹³Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." ¹⁷And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. ¹⁹So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.*

Notice, Jesus told Ananias to go find Saul not Paul. So according to the bible Saul is still Saul in Acts 9 after the Damascus road. The Story of Saul continues in Acts 9:20-30 with more about Saul, ending with Saul being sent from Jerusalem to his hometown of Tarsus. Please read this, Saul is called Saul throughout this story there has been no mention of Saul being called Paul or changing his name to Paul in the Bible story.

The next time Saul appears in Acts is Acts 11:19-26. Most scholars believe there has been a twelve year gap between the Damascus road and when Barnabas goes to get Saul. Let's read Acts 11:25-26 *²⁵Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. ²⁶And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

Well, some years after the Damascus Road Saul is still being called Saul. Again in Acts 12:25 Saul, Barnabas and John Mark are mentioned. And Act. 13 is Paul's 1st missionary trip. I want to read Acts 13:1-12 *¹Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Preaching in Cyprus ⁴So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the*

*synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant. ⁶Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹**Then Saul, who also is called Paul,** filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? ¹¹And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*

So did you see it. Acts 13:9 is the moment in the bible that Saul becomes Paul to us. From this point forward Saul is called Paul. Paul writes and signs his letter, Paul. And throughout the remainder of Acts, Paul is Paul, not Saul. So what happened and when. The bible does not say Jesus changed his name. It is simply not in the bible. In fact, Luke the writer of Acts of the Apostles changes his name in the text at this point with a purpose. The text literally says Saul was also called Paul. The Greek says it more like Saul who was also Paul, meaning also known as Paul. This leads us to believe Paul has been Paul and Saul for some time. A hint is in the names themselves; Saul is a Hebrew name meaning prayed for or asked for. Also Saul was the name of the first King of Israel so it was probably a common name. Pa. or Paulus is a Latin name or Roman name. Remember Paul was a Roman citizen and as such he probably had a Roman name. It is far more likely Paul was always named Paul probably from birth. Saul may have been an assumed Hebrew name when he went to study with Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Or his family being Hebrew may have given him this name. I've even heard his name may have been Paul Saul or Saul Paul. One being the surname. No one really knows but there is a hint in the Bible. Every time Paul is arrested, the authorities address him as Paul. Even when he appeals to Ceaser, he is called Paul. In a Roman court, as a Roman citizen, your proper name would have been used. This makes you think Paul was probably always named Paul. And Saul makes perfect since as well. Whether an assumed name or given name, Saul was a Hebrew name not a Roman name. It was common for people to assume a name which the culture would relate to. This happens today. We had a young lady from China stay with us a few years ago, her name was Yameng but she went by the name of Mandy while in America. And still uses Mandy to this day when speaking with me, but in China she is Yameng.

Of course, I can't be certain, what is certain is the Bible does not say Saul was renamed Paul after his meeting with Jesus on the Damascus Road. Of course, we don't know. When God renamed people in the Bible there was a reason and a meaning to the name. No so in this case. Also, why would Jesus rename a Jewish man with a Roman name. Just think about it. So, I think it is best to follow Luke's example, The apostle Paul also known or called Saul.

Father God, thank you for giving us the resources and sources to answer these tough questions. we know you know all things. Thank you for guiding our process and giving us the wisdom, we need to understand and help us to be stratified you choose not to explain. Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us. Help us to open the Bible and look into history to answer our questions. I pray these things in your name Lord Jesus, Amen

Thank you for joining me @ the PUNLA Coffee Table today, I hope you'll join us for the rest of the series about the "Tough Questions" that we struggle with as Christians.

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See you next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God bless.