

Presuppositions about the “conversion of Saul” that need clarification

1. **He fell off his horse:** there is no horse in the text; it comes from Renaissance art.
2. **He converted from “Jew” to” “Christian”:** neither Acts nor his letters ever say this, nor is it imaginable to a man like Saul.
3. **On his conversion, his named was changed (by God?) from “Saul” to “Paul”:** in fact, he had two names, as many people continue to do today in cross-cultural situations. His given name was the biblical name, “Shaul,” but in Roman circles, he went by “Paulus.”
4. **His conversion led him to place torah in opposition to the Gospel:** this notion comes from two sources: early so-called “Church Fathers” who wanted to claim the historical status of “Judaism” for themselves (because of Roman cultural norms) and the Protestant Reformation, where Luther and others used such a supposed opposition in their battle against the Roman Catholic Church.
5. **His “Gospel” was substantially different from what we find in the four gospels:** True, he rarely quotes Jesus’ teachings. At the same time, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the moment he came to believe changed the world forever, inaugurating the long-awaited “age to come” ushered in by Messiah Jesus.

Saul was an “apocalyptic” Pharisee who believed in resurrection and angels (unlike the Saducees; Acts 23.6-8). His “road to Damascus” experience transformed him from the “religion of empire” to the “religion of creation.” He went from using violence to crush opposition, to embodying Love of enemies.