

LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

LESSON 1: EARLY LIFE & CONVERSION

SAUL'S EARLY LIFE:

1. Saul's Birth & Family:

a. Born to a Jewish family of the tribe of _____:
Saul had been given the name of the most illustrious member of his tribe.

b. Born in _____:

Acts 21:39 (NKJV)

39 But Paul said, "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."

It is likely that his family was part of the Diaspora, displaced or relocated under Greek rule in the 1st & 2nd Century BC.

Tarsus was a seat of Greek culture in the region of Cilicia & Syria (in modern day Turkey).

- c. A _____ by trade: While his family most certainly enjoyed a certain degree of prosperity they were tradesmen and likely owned a successful leatherworking or tent making business. Paul would later use this trade to help support himself on his mission's trips.
- d. He was a _____ from birth: This would have been an honor rarely granted to a provincial Jew. Mostly likely Saul's father or grandfather had been granted citizenship for service they had rendered to the Roman authorities. This would have been passed on to Saul when his father registered him as a Roman citizen at his birth. This designation would have entitled Saul to protection from certain judicial punishments in the Roman empire, protected him against unlawful imprisonment and guaranteed him the right to appeal directly to Caesar.

2. Saul's Education:

Acts 22:2-3 (NKJV)

2 And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said:

3 "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.

- a. Saul was educated in _____.
- b. Under the tutelage of _____, a renowned Pharisee and doctor of the Law. Jewish tradition states that he was even the president of the ruling Sanhedrin Council.

Saul was raised to succeed in one of two worlds. The world of the prosperous Greek or the world of the devout Jew. He was prepared in his youth to win at both.

1 Corinthians 1:22–24 (NKJV)

22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Saul would later embrace a third identity. The identity of “the called out” ones i.e. the church.

3. Saul's Religious Career:

- a. It is quite likely that Paul himself became a member of the Sanhedrin council. One of seventy top leaders in all of Judaism. He was a _____ in the nation and in their religion.

Paul “cast his vote against” the saints. showing that he belonged to some sort of decision making group.

Acts 26:10–11 (NKJV)

10 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.

11 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.

- b. Paul _____ to and supported the execution of Stephen, a decision made by the Sanhedrin. Stephen was seized and brought before the council. Paul was intimately acquainted with Stephen's death sentence, possibly indicating he was part of the council.

Acts 22:20 (NKJV)

20 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.'

- c. Paul advanced in Judaism beyond many of his own age. Paul was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, who was a member of the council. It would not be surprising if Gamaliel's star pupil followed in the footsteps of his master. Galatians 1:13-14 gives a hint at his influence in the Sanhedrin council

Galatians 1:13–14 (NKJV)

13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.

14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

4. Saul's Persecution of the Church:

- a. Saul supported and possibly agitated the _____ of Stephen. Several significant spiritual seeds were planted by the death of Stephen.

Acts 7:54–60 (NKJV)

54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,

56 and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;

58 and 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.

59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

- i. Stephen _____ for Saul. His prayer would not go unanswered.
 - ii. Saul witnessed a glimpse of his own _____ and the peace that can be experienced even in persecution.
 - iii. Saul was exposed to the power of _____, perhaps in a way he had never seen before.
 - iv. The church was scattered, laying the foundation for the _____, _____ church, Paul would latter help lead.
- b. Saul is initially presented to us in the Scriptures as the principle _____ of the church.

Acts 8:1–3 (NKJV)

1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

- c. Saul made _____ of the church, arresting members and separating families.
- d. Saul is breathes out _____ and _____ against the church.

Acts 9:1–18 (KJV 1900)

1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

- e. Saul travels to other cities in his zealous pursuit of Christians, getting permission to bind and imprison any Christians he may find.

SAUL'S CONVERSION:

1. The _____ to _____ Experience:

Acts 9:3-9 (KJV 1900)

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

- a. Saul's conversion began with the _____ of Jesus on the road to Damascus: (Every conversion must begin with revelation)
- b. Saul asked two important questions:
 - i. Who art thou, Lord?
 - ii. What wilt thou have me do?
- c. Saul sat in darkness for three days praying and fasting. This would have certainly been a time of _____ for Saul.
- d. God sent _____ to pray for and teach Saul:

Acts 9:10-16 (NKJV)

10 Now 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."

11 So 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.

12 And 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."

13 Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.

14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

15 But 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.

16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

- iii. Jesus did not preach the gospel or instruct Saul in the plan of salvation.
- iv. Jesus sent to him a member of the church to guide him.

2. Born of Water and Spirit: A New Creature in Christ

- a. Saul was _____:

Acts 9:17-18 (NKJV)

17 And 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."

18 Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

b. Saul was filled with the _____:
Saul possessed the law of God in his mind, but it was not on his heart. He read the Law with a _____ over the eyes of his heart. His heart was _____ to the truth.

2 Corinthians 4:3–6 (NKJV)

3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,
4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.
5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.
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.

Yet, when he received the Spirit of God that veil was lifted.

2 Corinthians 3:14–18 (NKJV)

14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.
15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.
16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.
18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

While it is not expressly stated, it is likely that Paul's Holy Spirit baptism was accompanied by the evidence of speaking in tongues:

1 Corinthians 14:18 (NKJV)

18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;

Paul experienced first-hand the _____ that he would later wrote to the Corinthian church about:

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 (NKJV)

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,
10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.
11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

For Paul the change agents were:

1. The _____ of the Lord Jesus (Born of water)
2. The _____ of our God (Born of Spirit)

**References to Paul's conversion are found in: Acts 9:1-20, Acts 22, Acts 26, Philippians 3:4-17, Galatians 1:11-17

3. Saul would later be called Paul:

Acts 13:9 (KJV 1900)

9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

Saul was a prominent name with deep roots in Jewish history. It was the name of the first king of Israel, a man head and shoulders above others. It connoted human _____ and _____.

Paul, on the other hand is a Latin name meaning "_____" or "_____" one.

His first name connoted self-assurance, his new name implied a _____ and _____. His first name connected him to his Jewish history, his second name connected him to the future of Christianity.

Ephesians 3:8 (NKJV)

8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 (NKJV)

9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

(See Philippians 3:4-14)

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. God can use persecution to advance the mission of the church.
2. One can be educated, passionate and devoted and still be sincerely wrong.
3. No-one is beyond the reach of God's grace.
4. The plan of salvation for Paul was the same as every other NT believer.
5. Paul's past kept him dependent on God's grace.
6. God can use every aspect of your life to advance His plan. Nothing gets wasted.